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ABSTRACT

This document consists of the first six issues of the new quarterly serial "Northwest Education". Each issue has a theme title and typically consists of an opening review article on current trends and research related to the theme, followed by articles on exemplary schools or programs in the Northwest, promising practices, master teachers, or opinions of education leaders. Theme issue titles are: (1) "The Hispanic Child"; (2) "Mid Kids: Learning in the Middle Years"; (3) "Assessment in Action"; (4) "The Early Years: Making Learning Fun"; (5) "Charter Schools: Education Leaders Voice Their Views"; and (6) "Teaching in the 21st Century." Issues also include reviews of books, videotapes, teaching materials, and professional development materials; contact information for resources and technical assistance; short program profiles; letters to the editor; and hot topics from educational listservs. (SV)

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The Hispanic Child

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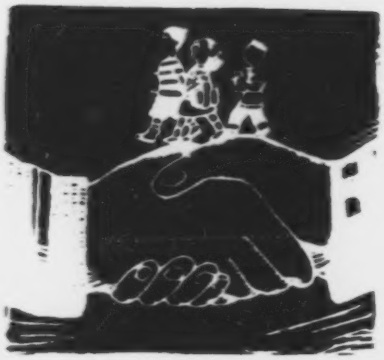

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COVER PHOTO: GRISELA PELAYO, A FOURTH-GRADER AT GATES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN OREGON'S SANTIAM CANYON SCHOOL DISTRICT. PHOTOGRAPHED BY JAY REITER OF SALEM, OREGON.

IN THIS ISSUE

The Hispanic Child

IN THE MIDST OF THE NATIONAL DEBATE ON IMMIGRATION, BILINGUAL EDUCATION AND "OFFICIAL" ENGLISH, SCHOOLS LOOK FOR EFFECTIVE WAYS TO TEACH HISPANIC STUDENTS

Across America, citizens debate immigration. It's an old question and a big one. It's about who we are as a nation and what we want to become.

Hispanics, most of them from Mexico, are among the largest immigrant groups. They come looking for work and better lives. Many of them come to harvest the produce of the land: apples and strawberries, lettuce and peppers, cotton and potatoes. Many stay, not only for jobs, but for the education U.S. schools can give their children.

The anti-immigration voices are calling for building walls at the border, for sending in the troops, for locking kids out of schools. They are calling for making English the official and only language of government.

Those who argue the opposing view say we have been a nation of immigrants since the Pilgrims met the Wampanoag tribe in the land we now know as Massachusetts. They say our strength lies in the many colors of our ethnic palette. They say, "Let us honor and embrace diversity."

In communities divided on who belongs, schools struggle to educate children whose first language is not English. Under the Constitution, no child can be turned away from the classroom. But it's not enough to let the child sit at a desk, left on her own to make it or fail. Schools, the courts have ruled, must take steps to help the language-minority child grasp the lesson and understand the language.

In these pages, you will meet teachers and administrators who are reaching across the cultural and linguistic divide to educate the newcomers. You will meet a former farmworker who wants her children to study law, medicine, and architecture. You will follow a recent immigrant through her day as a ninth-grader at a school that sets high standards for all and accepts excuses from none. You will look in on a first-grader who writes to Santa in two languages—just to be certain he gets his Super Nintendo.

You will find a synthesis of the research on bilingual education. A discussion on systemic reform. A look inside Northwest schools that are innovating. And ideas about what works.

Fields of Dreams

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By [illegible] SHERMAN [illegible]

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From their home in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, the Rosalez family began following the crops when David was six: Cotton in Texas. Pears in California. Potatoes and peppermint in Oregon. Asparagus, beets, and grapes in Washington. The family would pile into the pickup, Mom and Dad in the cab, the three kids propped on the luggage under a wooden canopy. Day and night, sometimes for three or four days at a stretch, the wheels rolled relentlessly along the highway. The family ate meals of homemade burritos or store-bought salami and bread. To fill the long hours, the kids sang Mexican songs in their loudest voices. Or they slept. Or they stared out the window, watching 2,000 miles of America pass by.

When the Rosalez children reached their teens, the family settled down. They lived on their savings in the winter when the fields lay fallow. "Even though my mom was illiterate, with no education in Spanish or English, she was *excellent* at budgeting," longtime Oregon educator David Rosalez recalls. "My parents were so proud of the fact that they never had to go on food subsidies or welfare."

The family left the migrant stream, Rosalez says, so that he and his brother and sister could earn their diplomas. "That," he says, "is an indication of how very much our parents cared about what kind of education we received. People say migrant parents don't care. They *do* care. They have dreams for their kids."

When the family started wintering in Central Oregon in the mid-1960s, they were among a handful of families who had settled in the Madras, Metolius, Culver area, he says. Today, the Jefferson County School District enrolls 550 Hispanic students—almost 20 percent of its student body.

Like Jefferson, rural districts all over the Northwest have seen their Hispanic enrollments double and triple in the past decade as families like the Rosalezes settle near the fields that drew them there. In Oregon, for instance, the number of Hispanic students in public schools increased more than 60 percent in the decade between 1974 and 1984—from 8,000 to 13,000. By 1994, nearly 33,000 Hispanic students were in Oregon classrooms.

Washington has seen the same quantum growth in its Hispanic population. The orchards of Central Washington's river valleys, which produce 60 percent of the nation's apples, have drawn thousands of Hispanic farmworkers over the years. Some have bought orchards and become growers, just as Midwestern migrants fleeing the Dust Bowl did in the 1930s, says Jim Thomas of the Washington State Apple Commission. "Most of today's growers came as pickers during the Great Depression," Thomas says. "The cycle continues. This is a very labor-intensive industry. The opportunities are there for anyone who is willing to work hard."

Patricia Sandoval, a kindergartner at Gates Elementary School in Oregon's Santiam Canyon School District, gets bilingual instruction in a multiage classroom. Photo by Jay Reiter

Today, Oregon's Hispanic student enrollment tops 6 percent of total enrollment—a bigger proportion than any other ethnic minority group. In Idaho and

Washington the picture is similar, with Hispanic enrollment exceeding 7 percent.

The Northwest trend reflects a pattern across America, where Hispanics make up the fastest-growing minority group. The growth accelerated in 1986, when Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act. The new law allowed longtime seasonal farmworkers to apply for legal residency.

"The act was a definite watermark," says Gloria Muñiz of the Oregon Department of Education. "When they became legal, they were no longer tied to being migrant. They were no longer part of an underground economy, being used by growers to harvest crops with little regard for legality and little opportunity to settle out, put down roots, and raise a family."

In Oregon alone, 30,000 laborers applied for seasonal agricultural worker status during the 18 months after passage of the act, says David Beebe of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. About 70 percent of those applications were approved.

"There was a tendency, when they settled in a community, for other people from the village they came from to join them," says Muñiz. "For instance, Mill City had very few Hispanic students, and then they woke up one year and they had 10, and then the next year they had 20, and then 30. Now, there's a little community beginning." (See article, Page 14.)

Among Mill City's recent Hispanic arrivals are Maria Martinez and her husband. Five years ago, they abandoned their lettuce-cutting jobs in California to join a relative in the Santiam Canyon's timbered hills. Martinez splits her working hours between the classroom, where she's a bilingual aide, and the Mexican restaurant she runs with her husband. The couple came north, she says, to give wider horizons to their three children. She hopes to see them pursue careers in law, architecture, and medicine. "I want them to be something," she says. "That's the reason we are working so hard, for them to have a good future—so we can have the financial means to send them all to college. They're *going* to go to college."

Towns like Mill City—and, by extension, the rural schools that serve them—have felt the impact of the Hispanic influx most strongly. Urban Hispanic populations are growing fast, too. But in contrast to Asian and Black students, who typically attend inner-city and urban-fringe schools, Hispanics tend to cluster in outlying areas, particularly in small towns, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. And while city schools usually enroll a broad cross section of ethnic groups, country schools traditionally have been less mixed. "Small rural towns throughout the country are grappling with an influx of Hispanic…immigrants who have followed jobs to these traditionally homogeneous settings," *Education Week* noted in January 1995.

Children with recent roots in Mexico or other Latin American countries often come to Northwest schools speaking only Spanish. Others speak indigenous languages such as Mixtec. Northwest schools' responses to the newcomers differ as widely as Oregon's wet Willamette Valley differs from its dry high desert. Some turn away Spanish-speaking kids who have no address but the family truck.

"We have principals who don't want to serve these kids," says Merced Flores of the Oregon Department of Education. "They say they are not citizens of this country. Some principals are not cognizant of the laws, and in some cases they refuse to know what the law is."

Migrant children in Idaho, too, have been spurned at the schoolhouse door, says Anita Brunner of the Idaho Department of Education. "We get reports of older kids going into high school and being told, 'You've come in too late. You're not going to get credit for this semester, so why bother at all?'" she says. "It's a nightmare, and you can hardly believe that any educator or front-office person would say that kind of thing. But apparently it still goes on."

Refusing to admit undocumented children violates a 1982 landmark Supreme Court decision, *Plyler vs. Doe*. The justices ruled that K-12 schools cannot deny admission to children because of their immigration status. Making sure that language-minority students—U.S. citizens and noncitizens alike—have meaningful access to education is a top priority for the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR). The OCR recently stepped up its enforcement of "Lau" cases—shorthand for *Lau vs. Nichols*, the unanimous 1974 Supreme Court decision saying schools must take steps to ensure that language-minority students can comprehend instruction. In the three years between 1991 and 1994, the OCR's Northwest office handled 21 language-minority equity cases—an average of seven per year. Then, in the 1994-95 school year alone, the office opened 12 cases in the region—three investigations based on complaints and nine compliance reviews initiated by the OCR, according to Patricia Yates of the OCR.

Several districts agreed to correct the problems before the investigation began. Others were found in violation of students' civil rights. At one rural Northwest district, for instance, a citizen complained when a bilingual program for Hispanic students was cancelled. The civil rights office looked into the allegations. It found that 90 percent of the limited-English-proficient students whose files it reviewed were getting Ds or Fs in their academic courses, or they were one to eight years below grade level in academic achievement. One teacher with no training in English as a Second Language (ESL) methods was teaching ESL classes.

In another district, the OCR found that three of the four high school teachers interviewed were unaware that students enrolled in their classes spoke little or no English. Six of those students got Ds or Fs in those teachers' classes. The investigation also found that ESL services were reduced during the 1993-94 school year because the number of language-minority students—and, hence, the ESL teacher's class load—had increased. The ESL teacher reported that she knew language-minority students who had dropped out after junior high "because of a lack of follow-up and services at the high school level."

"Many, many schools have nothing for these kids, or they provide only limited services," says Carole Hunt of the Center for National Origin, Race, and Sex Equity operated by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. "Not much has changed since the Lau decision, and now we are going in the other direction. There's a big faction of folks who are against bilingual education."

Nationwide, more than a quarter of students with limited English proficiency get no special services, either to help them learn English or to understand what's being taught, according to the National Association for Bilingual Education. This neglect takes a heavy toll: Only half of Hispanic students graduate from high school. Their dropout rate is America's highest—twice that of Blacks and four times that of non-Hispanic Whites.

In earlier eras, immigrants with little education and limited English could land decent jobs in trades or manufacturing. No more. Without advanced skills in communication and technology, today's immigrants will be trapped in low-wage, dead-end jobs. Even in the Santiam Canyon—located, in the words of one Oregon educator, "out in Timbuktu"—a lumber mill uses computerized laser equipment to slice thin sheets of veneer from raw logs. The plant's 25 Hispanic workers, recently hired for entry-level jobs sorting and grading veneer, will need good English skills to move off the green chain into better-paying, high-tech positions, says plant Vice President Rob

Freres. Just down the road from the veneer plant is the True Value hardware store. Even this business, the local source of bolts and screwdrivers, is computerized. Owner Tim Kirsch recently hired a Hispanic man who, Kirsch said, was eager, hardworking, and reliable. But after a few weeks, the employee sent word he wouldn't be coming back: He couldn't master the computer skills he needed for the job.

Second-grader Ascension Tavarez listens to a bilingual teaching assistant at Gates Elementary School. Photo by Jay Reiter.

Even as the numbers of language-minority students rise, the dollars for serving them diminish. Schools can draw on two pots of federal money for meeting the needs of kids with limited English proficiency: Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Emergency Immigrant Education Act. "Funding for these programs has not kept pace with the increase in eligible populations," notes a 1994 report from the U.S. General Accounting Office. According to that report, ***Limited English Proficiency: A Growing and Costly Educational Challenge Facing Many School Districts***, the $192 million appropriated for Title VII in 1990 was 40 percent less in real dollars than the 1980 appropriation. Funding under the emergency act dropped from $86 per student in 1984 to $29 in 1992. For migrant students, additional money is available under Title VI.

But some schools don't apply for the funds that are available. "Quite a few districts have limited-English-proficient kids but haven't applied for reimbursement dollars," says Flores. "There are several schools that won't identify the kids and some have said, 'We can take care of that child ourselves.'"

Despite balky administrators and shaky programs lingering at some Northwest schools, attitudes and practices are beginning to change, Flores maintains. Asserting that most educators "are concerned about the kids," he says the nation's growing need for a highly skilled labor force makes it essential that educators bring language-minority students into the school-reform loop. Preparing Hispanic and other immigrant children to be equal players in the economic, social, and political life of the community is a job everyone must shoulder together, he says.

David Rosalez agrees. One of six Distinguished Educators helping Oregon schools design schoolwide reform programs, Rosalez has seen a shifting outlook in the small town of Ontario on the state's eastern fringe, where he makes his home. He says Ontario's residents, educators, and business owners have come to recognize the benefits of providing solid schooling to *all* future citizens and consumers in the community. (See article, Page 8).

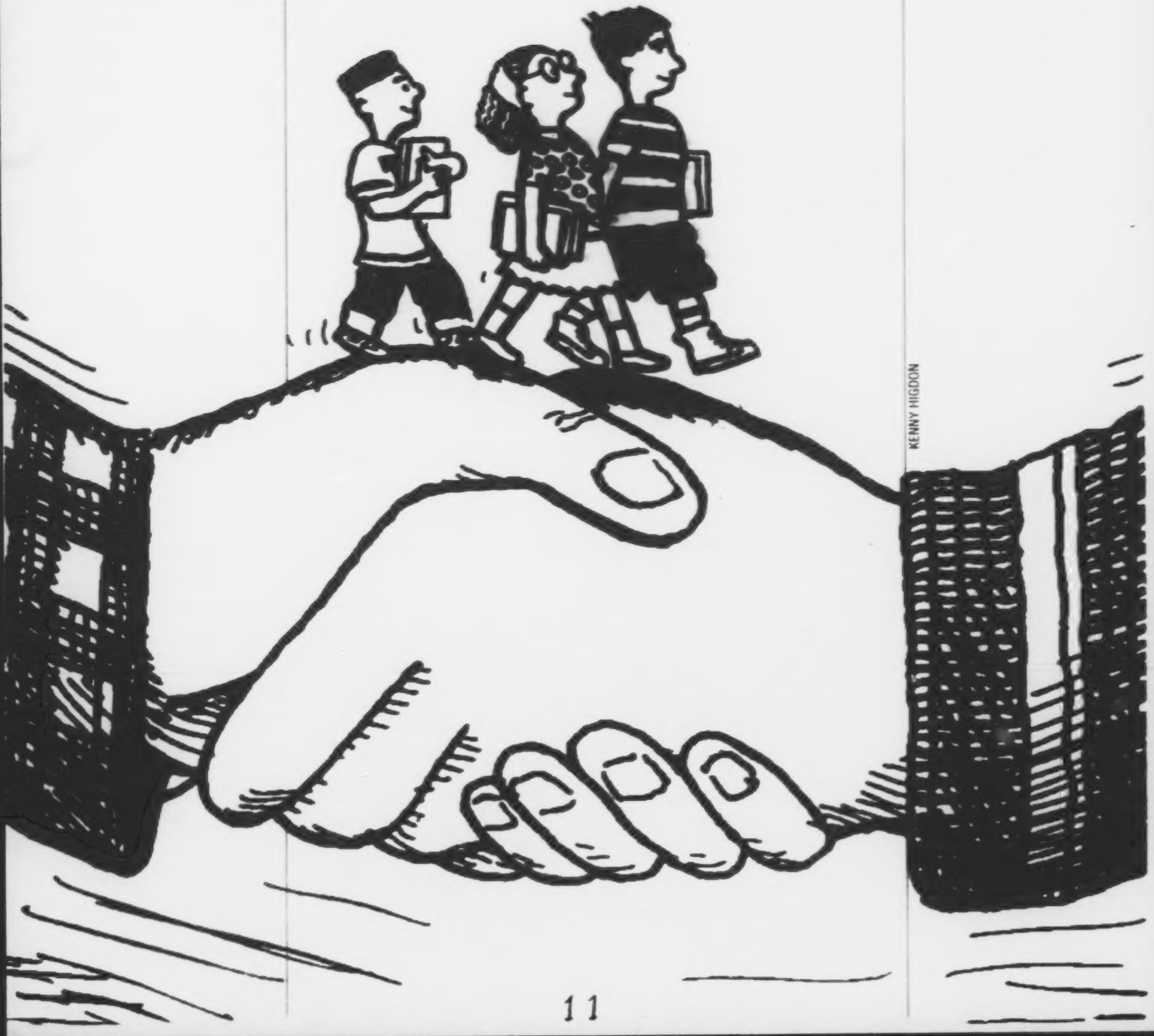
"If we don't educate these children, who's going to pay for our retirement?" Rosalez asks. "Who will be the leaders of the community? If we don't educate them, are we promoting two different social classes? And if so, who's going to support those at the bottom?

"The best bet," he says, "is educating them and making them productive citizens." ■

Two Worlds in One Classroom

OREGON'S ONTARIO SCHOOL DISTRICT HAS JOINED HANDS WITH A PROGRESSIVE DISTRICT IN TEXAS IN DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE BILINGUAL PROGRAM

By TONY KNEIDEK



KENNY HIGDON

ONTARIO, Oregon—Fifth-grade teacher Xochitl Fuhriman-Ebert moves in two worlds in her classroom as easily as she moves among the students working in groups on math and writing assignments.

A student's hand goes up—an indication that he is stuck on a concept or idea—and Fuhriman-Ebert is at his side discussing in English the student's work. A quizzical look tells Fuhriman-Ebert that the student still doesn't fully understand. The teacher explains the concept again—this time in Spanish—and a smile spreads across the student's face.

"Comprehension is critical," says Fuhriman-Ebert. "And if a student isn't understanding something in English, I explain it to them in Spanish."

Many of the 20 students in Fuhriman-Ebert's classroom live in Spanish-speaking families, but are taught in schools dominated by English. Jaime Oriedo, the 10-year-old class treasurer, reflects the bilingual and bicultural world of his Hispanic classmates. "My family speaks mostly Spanish," he says. "But my mom speaks Spanish and English, and so do I."

Fuhriman-Ebert says she practices bilingual education in her classroom to clarify concepts for students and to show respect for the children and their heritage. "I use Spanish to boost their self-esteem—their pride in who they are, and their pride in their culture," she says.

Fuhriman-Ebert is the exception at Lindbergh Elementary School, where 75 percent of the children are Hispanic. She is the only bilingual teacher in the school, and one of just a handful in the Ontario School District, where nearly 45 percent of the students are Hispanic. "Fifth grade is not the grade to begin a bilingual program," Fuhriman-Ebert says. "It should start in the first grade so that by fifth grade the students are dual-language. It pays for children to have two languages and to be fluent in both."

IT PAYS FOR CHILDREN TO HAVE TWO LANGUAGES AND TO BE FLUENT IN BOTH.

The Ontario School District has begun a districtwide focus on bilingual education that officials are hopeful will better serve the approximately 1,200 Hispanic students who attend the district's eight schools. "In five years," says Ron Guyer, director of special education and student services, "we want to have the disaggregated scores of Hispanic children equal to other students. But we also want all students' scores to go up in the district."

The district has decided to focus on bilingual education as part of a larger effort to boost standardized test scores of all students. Districtwide, notes Guyer, students score around the 40th percentile. However, when district officials disaggregated test scores two years ago, they found that Hispanic students were lingering at the 20th percentile on standardized tests.

"I think that, in some places, there was some denial around here," notes Guyer. "When we disaggregated our test scores, though, it all came to the surface. Up to this point, we didn't know any better. We did the best we could with the knowledge we brought to the table. Now, we have more knowledge and we must do better."

Twice this year, district administrators and principals have traveled to the Socorro Independent School District in El Paso, Texas. (See related story, Page 18.) The Socorro District, which bumps the Mexican border in the Southwest corner of Texas, serves a student population that is 98 percent Hispanic. In just six years, the district has turned around low test scores, high dropout rates, and dismal academic records. Today, the district boasts a 98 percent student completion rate with 90 percent of the students at grade level.

The Ontario schools have provided staff development on cultural awareness and brought in nationally recognized speakers. They also participate in an innovative program to provide tuition and expenses for local bilingual people who want to pursue a college teaching degree. (See related story, Page 11.) But they still needed to find better ways to teach their Hispanic students.

"We wanted to change, but we weren't making the progress we wanted to make," Guyer says. "We hit a point where we just didn't know how to change anymore. We also felt that if we could see a successful model of bilingual education—especially those of us who are visual learners—we could do it."

Enter Ontario's relationship with the Socorro schools, where principals and district administrators have observed classroom practices and talked with teachers, principals, and students. What they saw has helped them better visualize what they want to develop in Ontario. And much of the framework already is in place because of statewide restructuring of education in Oregon. "The thing we saw that correlated so well were the statewide assessments, standards, and benchmarks," Guyer says. "The whole focus of the Socorro schools is on those standards. Every teacher knows what those standards are and is working toward them. Their whole mission is to help these kids meet standards."

WE HAVE TO HAVE UNDERSTANDABLE INSTRUCTION, IN WHICH TEACHERS ARE CONSTANTLY CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING FROM CHILDREN.

The Ontario district is launching its own program to provide an equitable education for all students. It is in the process of establishing baseline data, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and adopting districtwide goals. "We're really in our infancy," Guyer notes. "This year, we're focusing on bilingual education. When we were in Socorro, we could see that the bilingual person was used not to teach Spanish, but to clarify instruction given in English. We've got to get to the point where our kids have understandable instruction."

CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING NECESSARY

Ontario is a community that takes pride in its cultural diversity. For a rural town of about 10,000 residents, it has a broad cross section of cultures, and a rich history of diverse settlers. Northern Paiute Indians were among the first inhabitants, and Mexicans were among the early settlers. Basque shepherds also moved to the area in the late 1800s, and nearby Boise, Idaho, was an important stop along the Oregon Trail. Japanese living in the United States worked the farm fields during World War II, when they were released from internment in central Idaho.

Today, about 8 percent of the population is Japanese American, and the Japan Nite-Obon Festival each summer is a popular community event. The area's substantial Hispanic American population grew as a result of field work in the region's agricultural industry.

DIAMONDS IN THE ROUGH

ONTARIO, Oregon—If you want bilingual teachers who are familiar with the community and sensitive to its needs, you might try growing your own.

That's the approach that several school districts in Eastern Oregon and Idaho are taking in an effort to bolster their bilingual teaching, counseling, and administrative staff with educators who are committed to the area. Dr. Jay Fuhriman, director of bilingual teacher education programs at Boise State College, has secured nearly $1 million in federal grants to help bilingual people earn bachelor's degrees and teacher certification. "We have had major problems, not just here, but all over the country, in getting sufficient bilingual teachers to meet the needs of our students," Fuhriman says. "Our population is growing and we find that we need more and more teachers."

Northwest districts with the need for Spanish-English bilingual teachers have recruited unsuccessfully in Texas, New Mexico, California, Arizona, and other states, Fuhriman adds. "We decided that the best way—indeed, the only way—to get the teachers we need was to find young people who have an interest in teaching, but who could not afford it or did not have the background to pursue a degree."

In 1976, the first year of the grant, 27 young people entered the program. Most of them were Hispanic, and most of them did not have a high school diploma or GED. "Twenty-one of them finished the program and became teachers," Fuhriman says. The grant has been renewed annually since then. It has helped more than 200 bilingual young people, most of them Hispanic, obtain their teaching degree.

The Ontario School District is among those participating in the program this year. The district has had little success recruiting bilingual teachers. "People are not necessarily interested in moving to Eastern Oregon," notes Carole Kitamura, personnel director at the 2,800-student K-12 district. "The whole issue of trying to grow our own is the only way we can see to increase our bilingual staff. We have a lot of diamonds in the rough—people who are already here and enhancing our community and schools. But they don't have a degree. It's nice to be able to take advantage of the great resources we have here. By helping local people get teaching degrees, we're creating a greater sense of family—a stronger community."

Ontario's schools, with a Hispanic student population close to 45 percent, have about 6 percent bilingual staff, Kitamura says. The district's goal is to increase its bilingual professional staff to 15 to 20 percent in the next five years.

Alfredo Ponce, an instructional aide at Lindbergh Elementary School in Ontario, is among those participating in the program. Ponce attended elementary school here, then graduated from high school in Hermiston, Oregon. He served in the Army and lived in Minnesota before returning to Ontario to participate in the program.

"The grant has opened the door for me to teach and help kids," Ponce says. "I see a lot of kids who think that muscle and force and brute strength is power. They don't understand that education is the real power."

Ponce says that it is important for children of Hispanic descent to learn to read and write English while retaining their Spanish language and culture. "If I can become a bilingual teacher, I can really help students," he says. "When I went to school, if you couldn't speak English you were kind of pushed off to the side. You can never forget who you are. I want to help students retain their Spanish language and to learn English and retain the two."

And that, notes Fuhriman, is the key to providing a bilingual education program that respects the culture of the language minority student while building a new framework for learning. "In a dual-language program, the language and the culture (of two languages) are both taught," he says. "You're looking at maintaining the native language and the native culture of the student while building a new language and a new culture for them. You can't really teach a language outside of its cultural context. You just lose the meaning. Language is probably the purest form of culture."

—*Tony Kneidek*

Cinco de Mayo, the Mexican celebration of independence, also is a popular community festival. The Ontario Basque Club sponsors a community festival as well. And last June, work began on the 74,000-square-foot Western Treasure Valley Cultural Center, a $12.5 million facility that will honor the various cultures in the region.

Despite the rich diversity, stereotypical images of Hispanic Americans surfaced during redistricting meetings in 1991-92, Guyer says. "I was shocked. There were people who said publicly that they didn't want their white kids to be in school with brown kids."

The district sees increased parental involvement as a way to begin breaking down some of those attitudes. "We want all parents represented in our schools so they can start talking to each other," Guyer says. "We need to get to know people for who they are, not just for how they look."

BARRIERS CRUMBLE AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Luigi Yannotta knew he was taking on a tough task when he accepted the principalship at Lindbergh Elementary School.

The school, with 98 percent of its students on free or reduced-price lunch, had a reputation for low student achievement, little parental involvement, and uninspired leadership. "It was the perception that Lindbergh parents didn't care, that there was nothing you could do to get them involved," Guyer says.

Yannotta has quickly disposed of the perceptions about his school and community. He has been instrumental in creating a new reality at Lindbergh, where 75 percent of the school's 260 students are Hispanic.

DIRECT PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN ACADEMICS IMPROVES STUDENT VALUES. IF IT'S IMPORTANT TO PARENTS, IT'S IMPORTANT TO STUDENTS.

"This is not unlike other schools where I've been," says Yannotta, who moved to Ontario after working in education for three years in Bolivia, four years in Ecuador, and eight years in bilingual programs in California. "There's a high number of Spanish-speaking children and families, and a low level of parental involvement."

Cultural differences, Yannotta notes, can prevent parents from becoming involved in schools, but celebrating the cultures of others can help break down barriers. "In Spanish populations, it is believed that the school is the exclusive shepherd of the child's education," Yannotta says. "That is changing, but we have to foster that change."

In his first year at Lindbergh, Yannotta has brought about 90 percent of the parents into the school. To set the stage at the beginning of the year, the school hosted a Mexican fiesta complete with a mariachi band, food, a slide show, and presentations about the school's goals for children presented in English and Spanish.

Yannotta also established a parent center in the school and has created teams of English- and Spanish-speaking parents who go door-to-door in the attendance area to encourage families to get involved. He also is arranging for Treasure Valley Community College to offer GED, effective parenting, ESL (English as a Second Language), and other adult classes at Lindbergh.

"I'm a believer in the research," Yannotta says. "In my experience with successful bilingual education programs, I have seen how direct parent involvement in academics improves student values. If it's important to parents, it's important to students."

In the parent center, Susan Summers tallies the results of a family survey and boasts of how Lindbergh parents are coming together. Nearly 70 people attended the second general parents' meeting, she says, and many are continuing their involvement in issues ranging from school safety to academic excellence to constructive discipline. "I was born in this town," Summers says. "I've been in this school system all my life, but I just got involved in this school because my granddaughter goes here and she lives with me."

Summers refers to a "pulse" that emanates from the school and encourages parents to take active roles in their children's education. "Our parents are becoming more involved," she says. "Making children the focus of concern has pulled the parents together."

Lindbergh parents and families were alarmed when a recent architectural report indicated that the school could not withstand high winds or even a minor earthquake. Concern for the safety of their children has become a rallying point, but other issues have also emerged. "People want to know how they can get their GED, how they can make their kids do their homework, how they should discipline their kids, and what's on the school lunch menu," Summers says. "This center really allows us to make friends and establish relationships with people of different beliefs and cultures."

COMPONENTS OF SUCCESS

Dr. Jay Fuhriman, who has taught bilingual education at Boise State University for two decades, says there are four overarching objectives of successful bilingual education programs. They are:

- Teach English so that students can become proficient in it
- Maintain students at grade level
- Require that language-minority students are held to the same rigorous academic standards as other students
- Ensure that students meet graduation standards on time

These components, Fuhriman says, are critical to helping students learn successfully. For example, students who are retained for just one year are half as likely to graduate as those who are at grade level. Retain a student for two years, he adds, and chances of graduating are reduced by 95 percent.

"It is so detrimental to retain children, especially for language," Fuhriman says. "It is much more effective to teach them the content area in a language that's understandable to them while at the same time teaching them English. If we teach them content in their native language, they can stay at grade level, albeit in a different language, but still at grade level. You know, math is math regardless of the language. Knowledge is knowledge regardless of the language."

VARIETY OF APPROACHES NEEDED

Yannotta believes that bilingual education alone will not provide equity for all students. "The emphasis at Lindbergh School is on literacy," he says. "We have to have understandable instruction, in which teachers are constantly checking for understanding from children."

But other teaching methods and attitudes also must change, he maintains. The old ways of doing business are no longer effective in today's diverse classrooms. "In years past, we had teacher-directed instruction. Those who caught on did fine. But the kid in the back row got left behind. He was alone. Now we have a lot of student-directed instruction. We use a lot of cooperative learning, and we've got students helping students in small work groups. We need all of these efforts." ■

Citizens of the World

A rural Oregon district helps Hispanic families settle into the community

By LEE SHERMAN [illegible]

"If a man be gracious and courteous to strangers, it shows he is a citizen of the world, and that his heart is no island cut off from other islands, but a continent that joins to them."

–Francis Bacon
Essays, 1625

From a rear booth at Giovanni's Mountain Pizza, School Board Chairman Arnie White sips coffee, looking out at Highway 22 as he talks. The midday traffic, heading east toward Central Oregon or west toward the Willamette Valley, kicks up sheets of winter rain as it passes. "In a society that is becoming more and more diverse, you can't raise a child without diversity," White says, his hands wrapped around his coffee cup. "It's not that simple anymore. We're going to have to get along with the whole world."

Most of the world bypasses Mill City, a 1,600-resident hamlet hidden in the foothills of the Cascades along the North Santiam River. To Oregonians, Mill City is known mainly as a way station on the road to Bend or Salem. But White has a broader view of the timber-dependent mill town that has been his home for 20 years. He sees a town increasingly tied to the world community, linked to the international marketplace of goods and ideas in which Mill City's children must be prepared to participate.

"It's going to be a global society a lot sooner than we think," he predicts. "The worst thing we can do is to send our children out there with a narrow-minded perspective."

White's global outlook has been influenced to a large degree by one group that not long ago was among Mill City's passersby. Hispanic seasonal workers—once drawn to the area as tree planters, bean pickers, and fruit packers—are dropping out of the migrant stream and settling into permanent jobs. Like many rural Northwest communities, Mill City has experienced a dramatic increase in Hispanic residents as workers settle, often joined by extended families—brothers, cousins, aunts, and uncles—who come north from Mexico or other Latin American countries in search of employment and educational opportunities.

The Hispanic influx comes at a time of wrenching change in the Santiam Canyon. Several family-owned mills have closed in recent years after federal timber sales were blocked to protect spotted owl habitat. The closures rippled throughout the canyon. For every mill job lost, another two or three related workers were displaced, says Rob Freres, vice president of Freres Lumber Company, a veneer plant and stud mill in Lyons just west of Mill City.

"It really tore the fabric of the community," Freres says. "Some long-term folks were forced to move. A crisis center was established, where there had never been a need for one in the past."

Faced with logging cutbacks and bitter battles over owls and old growth, many local residents who had always counted on timber began to feel there was no future in the woods and mills. Says Freres: "People in the canyon are not applying for jobs here in the numbers we would like. You can't blame them, after years of being bombarded with bad publicity."

Hispanic workers have stepped in to fill the employment gap.

Plumes of steam rising white against the wooded foothills are the most visible sign of the canyon's economic heartbeat—its mills. Inside the Freres plant equipped with the latest in lasers and computers, Hispanic workers mostly pull green chain, an entry-level job sorting green veneer by size and grade as it drops with a loud ***ka-thunk! ka-thunk! ka-thunk!*** onto a conveyor belt. The plant's last 25 openings, in fact, have been filled by Hispanics, who now make up 10 percent of Freres' workforce. Other canyon mills also have taken on Hispanic workers.

"In the late '80s, we would get maybe 10 Hispanic applicants a year; now we get 100," says Personnel Manager Tim McCollister. Freres Lumber also contracts with several Hispanic-owned companies specializing in brush disposal, tree planting, and slash burning.

"Hispanics come from the farms and the fields and the forests, and they're not afraid of hard work," Freres says. "We've seen the Hispanic community starting businesses, buying homes, putting down roots."

"How do you say Super Nintendo in Spanish?" Miguel asks his teacher. Along with his classmates in Gates Elementary School's bilingual, multiage classroom, the first-grader is writing a letter to Santa Claus in Spanish. No sugarplums here: Power Rangers, Barbies, and Rollerblades are the Christmas visions dancing in these kids' heads.

Miguel, like many canyon students whose first language is Spanish, switches easily from his native tongue when conversing with one of the classroom's two bilingual aides, to English when talking to English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher and program coordinator Joyce Gleason. Miguel, in fact, asks Gleason if he can write two letters, one in each language. As an astute member of a multicultural community, Miguel already understands that being multilingual can be advantageous in matters both personal and professional. Who, after all, knows for sure which languages Santa speaks? Why limit your options when Super Nintendo is at stake?

While the first-graders are putting in their orders to the North Pole, the kindergartners are grouped at an adjacent table doing an exercise on days of the week: *"Ayer fue jueves; hoy es viernes; mañana será sabado,"* the children chime along with the bilingual aide as she points to the words displayed on a flip chart. They then recite a poem about a piñata:

Bajen la piñata.
bájenla un tantito.
que le den de palos
poquito a poquito.

"We try to use songs and poems as a connection to their roots, their culture," says Gleason. "We encourage them to use Spanish. We send home books in Spanish so they will read with their parents and older siblings."

Gleason describes Mill City's approach as "first-language literacy with whole-language methods."

"Kids are programmed to learn, to make sense out of language," says Gleason. "If they're surrounded by language, they'll pick it up. Our job is to surround them with language that is important to them, that they can make sense of."

In the decade between 1985 and 1995, Hispanic enrollment in the Santiam Canyon School District tripled—from about 20 students (just over 3 percent of total enrollment) to almost 60 (close to 8 percent). The biggest jump happened last year, when language-minority enrollment doubled. Gleason, along with Vivian Ang, the district's migrant education coordinator, revamped the bilingual/ESL program when the flood of new Hispanic students, coinciding with changes in Title I regulations (see Page 36), gave the district additional federal funds and more flexibility for hiring staff, buying materials, and training teachers.

Gleason, who was part-time last year, now spends full days teaching the district's language-minority students. In the mornings, she leads bilingual classes for mixed-aged groupings of kindergartners through fourth-graders. At midday, she works with high school students, teaching English and tutoring kids who come by the migrant education office to study. In the afternoon, she team-teaches with the sixth-grade social studies teacher at the middle school, where language-minority students are served in regular classes with extra support from bilingual aides and peer tutors.

"Some of our teachers," says Gleason, "have teaching styles that are student centered, with lots of hands-on and cooperative learning projects that are ideal for students with limited English proficiency. One of our goals is to help all of our teachers to recognize that thematic units, manipulatives, cooperative grouping, and the use of visuals—graphs, charts, videos, pictures, maps—are beneficial to all students, and are essential for students trying to gain content knowledge through their second language."

But the issues reach far beyond the classroom and go much deeper than curriculum. Superintendent Bob Sari, a longtime rural educator whose door is propped open with a scuffed pair of cowboy boots, has seen the effects of a changing population in Oregon communities as he's moved from small district to small district—from Mt. Vernon to Phoenix to Elgin and Crane and, finally, to Santiam Canyon last year.

"If you travel the state," he says, "the sentiment of a lot of older Oregonians is no different here in Mill City than it is in Woodburn or anywhere else." Those older Oregonians who grew up during the "war years," he says, often view ESL and bilingual education as "baloney." And, Sari adds, the canyon has its share of "redneck folks" who don't welcome diversity. While Sari minimizes the negative attitudes, he admits that the newcomers are shaking up towns like Mill City that not long ago were insular and homogeneous.

"Our whole system, the personality of the community, is being affected by the change in people and how well they are going to meld into the community," Sari observes. "You have a lot of adjusting that's going to be necessary, and a lot of work to blend these people in."

Viewing the classroom experiences of Spanish-speaking children, then, as just one act in a full-length drama that casts the whole community, Gleason and Ang, with solid support from the superintendent and school board, wrote a plan for the district that went to the heart of the matter: attitudes. Racial friction had surfaced in the schools. Two years ago, a pair of promising Hispanic high schoolers dropped out. When Ang pressed them for a reason, they told her, "Some of the kids have been harassing us, and we're just tired of fighting it." Ang recounts other incidents: a group of freshman boys picking fights with Hispanic eighth-graders. Two Hispanic girls becoming frightened when several non-Hispanic girls followed them after school, taunting them with insults.

"The parents were concerned and the police were called," says Ang. "But it has not been handled, I feel, to the level or to the depth that it needs to really resolve the issue. Getting the kids to shake hands and say, 'It's OK' isn't enough because it doesn't solve the *inner* turmoil."

That turmoil was underlined dramatically again this year when, in two separate incidents, non-Hispanic kids pulled weapons—one was a gun, the other a knife—on Hispanic students off-campus, according to Ang.

"These are the reasons," she asserts, "why we felt it was necessary to approach it on a community level. It was more than the school district could handle alone."

Maria Martinez and her husband harvested lettuce in Southern California until the gangs and traffic and crowds caused them to look northward, toward the forested Oregon river canyon where a relative had prospered pulling green chain at a plywood mill. As the daughter of seasonal laborers who had migrated between Mexico and Texas, Martinez had seen conditions for farmworkers deteriorate: "more work, less pay, more strict," is the way she puts it.

So Martinez—one of three Marias who assist Joyce Gleason in her ESL classrooms—moved to Mill City to settle with her family. She divides her time between the

> "Hispanics come from the farms and the fields and the forests, and they're not afraid of hard work. We've seen the Hispanic community starting businesses, buying homes, putting down roots."

classroom and the Mexican restaurant, Sierra, which she owns and operates with her husband. The canyon, she says, is a good place to raise her three children. Still, the family has had a few painful episodes. She recalls that one administrator, no longer with the district, ignored her whenever she was in the building. "He just pretended I wasn't there," she says. And her middle son, a 10-year-old, came home upset one day after another child made disparaging remarks about his Mexican heritage.

Incidents like these spurred the district to invite Martinez and other Hispanic parents to a November meeting with principals and counselors from each of the district's four schools to air grievances and share perceptions. An impartial translator from nearby Chemeketa Community College acted as an intermediary.

"The parents said they felt that the teachers and administrators needed some training on how to be more culturally aware and sensitive to the needs of Hispanic children," says Ang.

In response, the district invited cultural-competency trainer Daniel Duarte of Tualatin, Oregon, to put on a workshop in January for school staff, police officers, and Hispanic parents to, in Ang's words, "help people become more accepting culturally and know how to cross some of those bridges that separate us."

Meanwhile, the district spearheaded an interagency meeting aimed at brainstorming strategies to calm community jitters about the canyon's changing demographics. Mill City, seeing gang- and drug-related problems arise in the neighboring town of Stayton, wants to head off such troubles, says Ang. Present at the invitational meeting in late November were key community players: police officers, migrant education staff, and representatives of the Canyon Crisis Center and the Santiam Canyon Youth and Families Alliance—a volunteer community agency that has received funds from the Marion County Commission on Children and Families to operate the Family Resource Center (providing bilingual information and resources) and the Community Assistance Center (providing donated food and clothing). Lieutenant Raul Ramirez of the Marion County Sheriff's Office facilitated.

Out of that meeting has emerged what Ang describes as a "loosely structured" group called the Community Awareness and Education Committee to "build relationships" and address the community's cultural, economic, law enforcement, and local government concerns on an ongoing basis.

Other recent or upcoming events include:

- Diversity Day, an all-day event at Santiam High School featuring Steven Schoonmaker of the Salem Police Department and including interactive games that give kids a chance to view cultural differences from the perspective of the other group; presentations at the elementary and middle schools will focus on hurtful words
- International Day, a potluck gathering where Hispanic and non-Hispanic families are matched up for games and activities, sponsored in collaboration with community agencies
- A "survival Spanish" class for teachers

The school board has been 100 percent behind the district's initiative on behalf of Hispanic children and their parents, Chairman Arnie White asserts. It's a role that in his mind properly belongs to the schools.

"In a community this size, the school district is the hub," he says.

See Citizens, Page 39

Great Expectations

Students at Socorro High School near the U.S./Mexico border are inspired to succeed by caring teachers and progressive administrators who expect the best and accept no excuses

By LEE SHERMAN CALDELL

FIRST PERIOD *"Who were the unusual members of Hannibal's army in the Punic Wars?" the teacher asks as she walks among the seated ninth-graders, a piece of chalk poised in her hand.*

"Elephants!" calls out a ponytailed 14-year-old.

"Right, Olga. Good." World history teacher Kara Eifolla strides to the board and adds Hannibal and his battalion of wild beasts to a growing time line of ancient Rome. Leading Olga Lara and her classmates through the empire's rise and fall, Eifolla coaxes understanding from them with a carefully paced give-and-take that pulls in every student, even a fidgety cluster of boys striving for invisibility in the back of the room. Speaking in English, she guides her class of native Spanish speakers through difficult linguistic terrain cluttered with such knotty concepts as plebeians, patricians, and agricultural reform with a Q&A format that systematically reinforces oral language with written language: The student hears the word, sees it on the board, reads it in the text, writes it in her notebook. Eifolla questions, repeats, defines, clarifies, and questions again: What does "decline" mean? What is a "crisis"? What is a "reform"?

A few days into her second semester at a U.S. school, Olga—equipped with a considerable repertoire of English skills picked up from friends and TV in her native town of Ciudad Juárez just across the border—pays close attention to the time line taking shape on the chalkboard. It will form the basis of an upcoming assignment: a handmade book on the Roman Empire. When the bell rings, Olga gathers her belongings and blends into the throng of students hurrying to Second Period.

In many ways, Socorro, Texas, feels like an extension of Mexico, as though Ciudad Juárez *had spilled across the Rio* Grande. Much of Socorro has the thrown-together look of a town that is fast gobbling up the fields and open spaces that only a few years ago made it a rural outpost on the fringe of El Paso. Chain-link fences surround houses pieced together with brick, stucco, and concrete. Laundry flaps on clotheslines. Chickens roost in backyards.

Most of Socorro's residents trace their roots to Mexico. Many of them, like ninth-grader Olga Lara, are recent arrivals. Olga's parents moved the family across the border last summer in hopes of finding better jobs for themselves and ensuring better futures for their three teenagers. The Laras have put their educational hopes into the hands of the teachers and administrators at Socorro High School, whose 2,000 students come from the town's poorest neighborhoods. Some live without plumbing, heat, or electricity. Almost all qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Socorro's student demographics—98 percent Hispanic, 90 percent poor—would suggest a cauldron of violence and gang activity. Yet Olga's parents chose Socorro High because it is relatively free of the *Cholos* gang members who plague other area schools. Neither graffiti nor vandalism mars the

spotless school, where custodians are always hard at work with paintbrushes and mops. A new wing at the school features vaulted *ceilings, rock walls,* and soaring windows that look more like something out of *Architectural Digest* than *Educational Facility Planner*.

The conventional wisdom on "risk factors"—characteristics such as ethnic minority heritage and low family income that can short-circuit academic success—would predict not only big discipline problems at Socorro but also low scores and high attrition. Yet the numbers defy the stereotypes. Fewer than 2 percent of Socorro's students drop out, and 85 percent of Socorro's 1995 graduates went on to technical school or college. Scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) are at or above state averages—in some cases, well above. Socorro's 1995 12th-grade class, for instance, scored 42 in reading compared with an average state score of 33. In writing, those same students scored a full 20 points higher than students statewide (71 versus 51). And in math, Socorro kids outscored other kids 45 to 35.

It wasn't that long ago that Socorro High was just another struggling border school with test scores bumping the floor. Today, it is a Blue Ribbon school that attracts educators from places as distant as Ontario, Oregon, in search of strategies to borrow. (See

related story, Page 8.) But trying to pinpoint the reason for the transformation is a classic chicken-and-egg conundrum. Ask the teachers, and they will point to Principal Michael Quatrini. Ask Quatrini, and he will point to the teachers. And everyone points to Dr. Jerry Barber, the district superintendent, who points back at the teachers and principal. The answer lies somewhere in the middle, for change at Socorro High bubbled up from the bottom at the same time it was filtering down from the top. In the blending and mixing of inspired teaching and enlightened administration, Socorro began to turn out students who could compete and succeed in a highly competitive global economy.

SECOND PERIOD *"Eduardo dropped out of school," laments teacher Dennese Weber-Watts. She looks at the semicircle of students in front of her as though waiting for an explanation for this bad news. The students, too, seem sad and perplexed. It is clear, even to the casual observer, that kids at Socorro don't drift away unnoticed or unremarked. Here, dropouts aren't business as usual.*

Second Period is speech. Olga's favorite class because, she says, she's eager to learn the linguistic skills she'll need when she becomes a lawyer. Today's lesson begins with the Greek and Latin roots of English words. The Greek word *logos, meaning "word" or "study," for example, turns up in the English terms for academic disciplines such as biology and psychology, Weber-Watts tells the class. As she talks, she draws feedback from the students with constant questioning, reinforcing the discussion visually by scrawling the roots and their derivatives on the overhead projector. Next, Weber-Watts calls on Olga to lead a review of "voiced" versus "unvoiced" sounds. In floppy cotton pants and a denim vest, big silver loops dangling from her ears, Olga takes the teacher's place at the front of the class. With some prompting from Weber-Watts, Olga holds her hand to her throat and demonstrates the vocal-chord vibration that characterizes voiced consonants. She then moves to a discussion of blended consonants such as pl, fl, sl, and scr. Weber-Watts offers clues and guidance when Olga gets stuck.*

The Language Brokers

Classes for language-minority students at Socorro High School are taught in English. But when teachers divide their class into groups for collaborative projects or interactive learning, students often talk among themselves in Spanish.

Magda Maureira, ESL department head, encourages students to converse in their native tongue. Here's why:

"The more you can get kids to talk to each other, the more opportunities they have to sound off to each other, to filter through stuff, the better," she says. "It's real important for a kid to sit next to someone else and say, 'Did I understand? The teacher said da-da-da-da-da.' Sometimes, that's when learning is happening, that's when they're clarifying.

"We have this heterogeneity of kids, and among them are the language brokers who have more (English) than the others. You just have to bank that those kids are out there and that they're going to share and clarify. For the language broker, understanding may happen from teacher to ear, but that won't happen across the board.

"Ultimately, whatever the kids are going to turn in is going to have to be in English. Whatever it takes to get there should be allowed. That's critical in training teachers because a lot of people don't understand that use of native language." ■

What turned Socorro High School around was a radical change in thinking about how schools should be organized and managed. There was—to invoke a hot phrase from education's current reform lingo—a paradigm shift. Eight years ago when Jerry Barber (whom school staff describe as "open-minded" and "progressive") became superintendent of Socorro Independent School District, he put each school in charge of its own operations—and, by extension, made it accountable for its outcomes—by mandating site-based management. That mandate came several years before Texas required site-based management statewide.

Not everyone got on board.

"Some principals bought into site-based decisionmaking, and some did not," says Maria Arias, bilingual director for the district. "Some had a real difficult time letting go, being a facilitator, letting teachers come together and make decisions about how money would be spent and so forth."

Then came Quatrini. When he took the high school principal's post in 1992, he set out to make site-based management work at Socorro High School. "At first, teachers were doubtful," Arias recalls. "But little by little, he won their confidence, their faith, their trust, because he has proven that the teachers *can* run the school and he can facilitate."

Quatrini reorganized the freshmen and sophomores into blocks of 125 students who are assigned to five teachers for the entire year. The teachers in these blocks share a common daily conference period, and they meet weekly to plan thematic units and integrated lessons, devise strategies for struggling students, and confer with parents. A school-improvement team made up of staff, parents, and students meets monthly to keep the school moving toward its goals.

The terms "umbrella" and "net" pop up a lot in Quatrini's conversation —terms that suggest a sheltered environment where "slipping through the cracks" isn't something that happens to kids.

"We don't fail these students," Quatrini declares. "As long as there's support for them, they'll be successful."

One block, the English as a Second Language (ESL) program, has undergone its own radical reform, which began independently of the schoolwide change effort but then merged smoothly into the school's new shape. Olga is one of about 200 language-minority students at Socorro who take all of their academic classes from teachers who specialize in ESL or who, like Kara Eifolla in history or Denise Weber-Watts in speech and Latin, have earned or are working toward ESL endorsements and use ESL methods to teach academic subjects. ESL students read the same textbooks and learn the same material as their English-proficient counterparts. Only the style of delivery is different. After all, Quatrini points out, these kids "don't have a *learning* problem, they have a *language* problem."

Eighty teachers—nearly half of the school's faculty—have earned or are working toward an ESL endorsement. The district not only picks up tuition costs for teachers who earn ESL credits, it also awards them $1,000 annual stipends for teaching ESL sections and sends bilingual aides to college if they want to become teachers.

THIRD AND FOURTH PERIODS *After art class, where Olga designs a ceramic house patterned on the Historic Revival style of architecture, she takes her place in Rosanne Loya Thompson's physical science class. Today's lesson in forces and motion centers on the formula for calculating speed. "Speed equals distance divided by time," Thompson says, rephrasing the formula several times, writing it on the board, checking often for understanding by asking for feedback from students. Building on last week's lesson on metric units of measure, the teacher—dressed comfortably in a neat pair of blue jeans—gets down on the floor and demonstrates how to apply the formula to a concrete problem: calculating the speed of a plastic wind-up car using a meter stick and a stopwatch. The students watch intently. The room is silent except for the car's raspy clatter.*

"OK, what is the speed of a car that moves 914 meters in 200 seconds?" Thompson asks after the demo car lurches to a stop beside the meter stick and the class helps convert the distance from centimeters to meters. Olga scribbles in her notebook. "Who has the answer? How fast was the car going? Olga?"

"Four-point-five-seven meters per second," Olga responds.

After working several sample problems for the class, Thompson breaks the students into groups and assigns them to collaborate on six trials with the mechanical cars. Olga and her group mates confer in Spanish as they time their trials and record their data.

Socorro High School was making do with two part-time ESL teachers until the enrollment began to balloon after the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. The legislation granted legal residency to longtime seasonal agricultural laborers who could document their U.S. work history.

"That's when our program blew up," recalls Magda Maureira, one of the original ESL staffers. "By the summer of 1988 it was out of control. Schools were starting to *burst* with (language-minority) kids."

Help arrived in the form of a federal bilingual education grant under Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The almost $1 million flowing into the high school from 1990 through 1994 created five full-time ESL teaching slots, bought a roomful of Macintoshes and materials, and paid for a curriculum consultant. The reinvented ESL program bridges the "huge gaps from one class to another" that used to swallow kids up, says Maureira, who now heads Socorro High School's ESL department. Now, students like Olga have ESL-trained teachers all day, every day—teachers who collaborate to "provide a continuum in the curriculum," says Michael Quatrini. A recent unit on *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, pulled together language arts (Shakespeare's play), history (15th-century Italy), science (the chemical makeup of poisons), and math (calculating dosages of substances). As a tie-in to a unit on Mexico, the home economics class baked a room-size cake in the shape of Mexico, decorating it to show states and topographical features. The cake was served to parents at a school-sponsored meeting on immigration issues, while students from the parenting class provided child care. In these ways, a lesson on baking became a unit on geography, and chemistry found its way into classic literature.

Besides integrating curriculum, Socorro's ESL teachers use tactics such as real-world context, active learning, cooperative grouping, and personal connections.

"We have built our program around whole-language concepts, not the worksheet approach," says Elvira Estrada, secondary ESL/bilingual teacher and teacher leader. "We don't want isolated skills."

FIFTH PERIOD *Olga takes her seat in Martin Rede's algebra class, which begins with a story problem aimed at preparing the*

students for the TAAS, which all seniors must pass to graduate. A student reads the problem aloud, as Rede helps him with pronunciation: "Mary has three rectangular flower beds measuring one-point-five meters by five meters. She has decided to make a tulip border around four sides of each flower bed. If the tulips must be planted 50 centimeters apart, how many tulip bulbs will Mary need?"

As Rede leads the students through the problem and its solution, he checks constantly for understanding, going beyond the math concepts involved.

"What does rectangular mean?" he asks. "Is it spelled differently in English and Spanish?" Although he poses his questions in English, Rede allows the students to answer in Spanish. When the students seem stuck, he moves from English to Spanish, Spanish to English, to ensure comprehension.

"What is a tulip?" Rede asks the students. "What does it look like?" He draws a rough approximation of a tulip on the board, and writes the word, showing the similarity with the Spanish word tulipán*. ("They're intimidated by the English," Rede confides later. "I try to show them they already know a lot of English by showing them that many Spanish words*

Above: Ninth-grader Olga Lara visits her mother, also named Olga, at the Good Time mini-market where she works as a cashier. In the photo on Page 20, Olga works with fellow science students to calculate the speed of a wind-up car. Photos by Nohemy Gonzalez.

are similar to the English. Many of these kids do well in physical science and biology because of the Latin roots.")

"What's a bulb?" a student calls out.

"What kind of bulb are we talking about here?" Rede asks. "A foco de luz*—a lightbulb?" A few students snicker. "No? We're talking about a tulip bulb, a* camote.*" He explains how a bulb looks, how it grows, tells them an onion is a bulb, relates it to a potato tuber ("You know, the thing you cut up and fry and put ketchup on"), tells them Easter lilies grow from bulbs. Olga offers jicama as another example. By pulling in all of this—a little reading, a little science, a little English vocabulary—Rede not only has brought the math problem into the realm of real things (flowers, french fries), tying it to students' senses and experiences, but he also has connected math to other areas of study, giving broader meaning and context to the lesson.*

The state of Texas requires only that language-minority students take a yearly oral assessment of English proficiency. Socorro, though, also uses a battery of written tests in Spanish to measure academic and literacy skills such as writing ability and mastery of math concepts. Oral assessments by themselves are only minimally informative, Maureira says. That's because test anxiety can mask solid oral skills and because a student may have a mismatch of abilities: strong oral skills with weak academic skills or vice versa.

"Testing in Spanish makes a whole lot of sense," notes Maureira. "It tells you a whole lot more about where this kid has been and where he can go. The more literacy they bring in their native language, the quicker they go into a second language because they have a lot of transference."

Adds Maureira: "To learn is to learn is to learn. If you learn in one language, you basically learn in another."

The assessments determine where students start in ESL, from Level 1 for kids with low academic scores and no English to Level 4 for kids who are almost ready to join the mainstream. Olga entered Socorro High at Level 3 based on a solid foundation in English and outstanding scores on the written math and language arts assessments. Her dad Fernando, a salesman for a nut company, had plunked her down in front of English-language TV and videos from the time she was small in hopes of giving her a head start on success in America.

Other kids bring less to build on. One of Olga's schoolmates, whom we'll call Maria, had left school in her Mexican hometown of Chihuahua at age 11 or 12 to work in her mother's tortilla factory. The Immigration Reform and Control Act allowed her father, a longtime farmhand at a Texas ranch, to bring his family north to Socorro, where Maria started high school at 16 with scores hovering at fifth-grade levels. Her files show slow, steady progress and then a sudden burst of success in her third year, when her math score rocketed from 52 to 89 and her language-arts score from 41 to 80.

Whether, like Olga, they bring solid skills or, like Maria, they come with a smaller foundation, language-minority students get ongoing support and guidance. Each student is assigned to a committee of four—an assistant principal, a bilingual teacher, an ESL teacher, and a parent—which meets at least twice a year and oversees the student's progress. ESL kids get support in other ways, too. At the weekly "content day," ESL teachers help them work through trouble spots in their academic classes. And the ESL office, staffed by two bilingual paraprofessionals, offers all kinds of assistance, from clarifying homework assignments to arranging counseling appointments. From that office, the constantly humming hub of the program, Estrada and Maureira throw themselves headlong into keeping each and every student on track to graduation.

One day, for example, a student drops into the ESL office and complains that he doesn't understand an assignment given by a non-ESL-endorsed health teacher. While Maureira and Estrada set about getting the student reassigned to an ESL health class, they explain that hasty, verbal instructions are likely to be lost on kids with limited English skills. "Deliberate redundancy"—finding many ways to say the same thing—is one key strategy that characterizes ESL, they explain. "That kid needs to see the assignment on the board, he needs to have it expanded, he needs to have a copy of the prompt," Maureira says. "It's very simple.

"And," she adds, "it's good for all learners."

That kind of personal attention is why Olga's parents brought their children to Socorro.

"What I like here is that if a student has a problem, the teachers take care of it," says Olga's mom, also named Olga, who works as a cashier at a Good Time mini-market. "It doesn't matter if it's a big problem or a small one: they always call you. They always pay attention to the student."

Even parents who still live in Mexico want their kids to have what Socorro High School offers. "You will see cars with license plates from Juárez or Chihuahua dropping off their kids," says Arias, adding, "We're going to educate them. It's not like in California with Proposition 187 [the 1994 ballot measure denying K-12 public education to illegal-immigrant children]."

The school as a whole woos

parents: A parent room staffed by two parent coordinators is the headquarters for parent volunteers who work in the classroom and the library. Counselors work at night to accommodate parents' work schedules. Information goes home in both English and Spanish. Parent meetings cover critical topics such as citizenship and residency, local services, and college opportunities. The high school hosts community-college classes for parents, and makes the school's library and computer equipment available to them.

Parents Night typically attracts 50 percent to 60 percent of parents, Quatrini reports.

"Parents do attend meetings," says Arias. "I get so upset when when people say, 'Parents just don't care.' That's not true—it's just not true."

In the ESL program, strong teacher-student bonds earn parents' respect and participation.

Says Arias: "Because of the closeness of these kids to Magda and Elvira and the other teachers, they will go home and tell their parents, 'My teacher needs to talk to you,' or 'You need to go to this meeting.' And the parents show up because they know that the teachers are genuine."

SIXTH AND SEVENTH PERIODS *Olga's final two classes, English and reading, form the ESL literacy unit that all of Socorro's language-minority students must take. Sixth period meets in the computer lab where Olga and her classmates—working on Macintoshes paid for with Title VII money—experiment with using ClarisWorks software to create decorative borders and ornamental lettering. Their assignment: to make posters out of yesterday's writing project, a list of three personal goals to achieve during the school year. Olga deftly manipulates her mouse, trying out various effects before choosing a delicate border and a bold typeface for her top three school goals: to get better grades, to behave better with her teachers, and to learn more English. By tomorrow, Olga's poster, printed on hot-pink paper, will hang with the other students' work on the classroom wall.*

Magda Maureira begins her reading class with a discussion of Martin Luther King Jr. With the federal holiday marking King's birthday just days away, students had been asking about the civil rights leader and his significance in American history. As Olga and her classmates follow along, Maureira reads a passage about King, speaking slowly, enunciating every syllable with care, filling her voice with inflection. Then she questions the class: "What was the strategy behind the bus boycott? What was King's message for resolving conflict and righting social wrongs? What does "junior" mean? Where was King born? Can you find Atlanta on the map? What's coming up this summer in Atlanta?"

Finally, the lesson turns to The Legend of the White Doe, *a novel by William Hooks set in colonial America. Maureira walks them through their homework assignment, a reading log on Chapter 1. It includes a summary, a personal reaction, a favorite passage or incident, lingering questions or uncertainties about the story, connections to personal experience or other coursework, and new vocabulary learned. The students then pair up and read aloud to one another, alternating sentences. While the voices of their classmates drone in the background, Olga and her partner read earnestly, giggling now and then over their attempts to decipher such thorny words as sassafras.*

In 1987, Socorro Independent School District joined 12 other poor Texas districts in *Edgewood vs. Kirby*. The legal action is what Arias calls a "Robin Hood" suit, originally filed in San Antonio to equalize funding between low-income and affluent districts. Seven years later, the suit is pending. Meanwhile, economic conditions have not improved in the neighborhoods surrounding Socorro High School. Highway 10 slices through town like a razor. It is a '90s version of the "tracks" that once delineated the "good side" from the "bad side" of American cities. Comfortable families live on the north, struggling families—those whose kids attend Socorro High—live on the south. Sometimes, Arias says, "six, seven, eight people live in one room." They work in restaurants or gas stations or convenience stores, or in factories making boots or blue jeans. Some are migrants, picking cotton in the South, then moving north into the orchards of Oregon and Washington or the potato fields of Idaho.

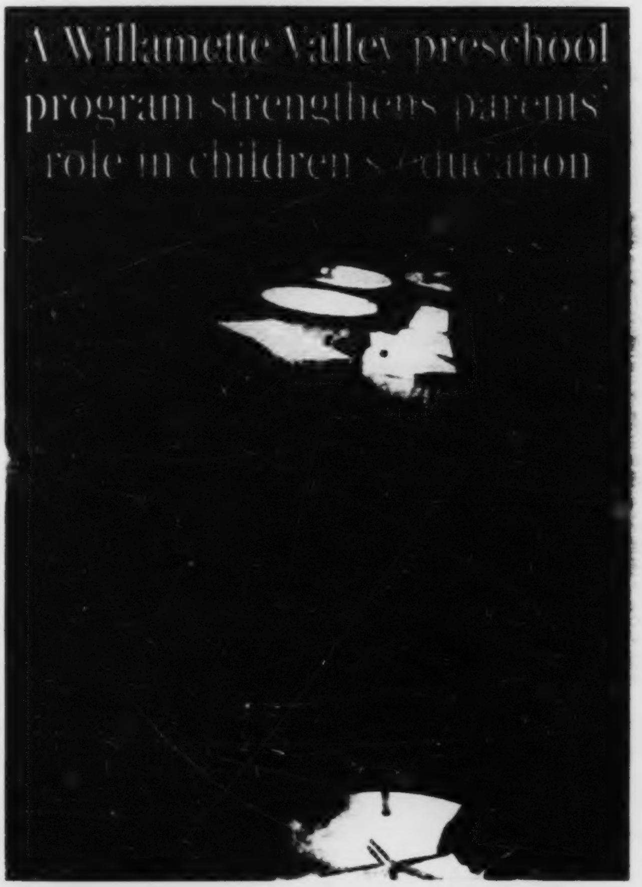
But at Socorro High School, being poor doesn't justify poor performance. More than any other factor, high expectations in the face of economic hardship explain why the school works, asserts Superintendent Barber. "We do not accept failure," he says. "The faculty and the administration have the attitude that our kids *can* succeed, and that it's our job to help them achieve at the highest levels they can attain. The school will not accept excuses."

Even the poorest families—cooking with butane, drawing water from wells, sharing cramped quarters with aging grandparents, raising poultry to stretch food dollars—send their kids to Socorro High School with hope.

Reports Arias: "We always hear, 'We want our kids to have a better life than we did. We think that if they learn English, it's going to be better for them.'" ■

FAMILIES FIRST

A Willamette Valley preschool program strengthens parents' role in children's education



GERVAIS, Oregon—"*¡Buenas noches!* Good evening!" Carolyn Espinoza smiles at the 75 mostly Hispanic parents clustered around a dozen tables in the Gervais Elementary School cafeteria. Outside, a mid-December rain drenches the fields and farms surrounding the rural school, but inside the brightly lit room, laughter and chatter drown Espinoza's words. Standing in the middle of the assemblage, she repeats her greeting, first in Spanish, then in English. After weeks of wondering whether anyone will show up at the premiere Families First science fair, resource teacher Espinoza is clearly pleased at the turnout.

For Families First, a program of Oregon's Marion (County) Education Service District (ESD), the science fair is yet another successful effort to involve Hispanic parents in the culturally appropriate education of their children. Since 1977, the Marion ESD has offered a preschool program primarily for Hispanic residents of the Willamette Valley. "Our philosophy," says Tina Garcia, program coordinator, "is to provide parents with the belief, support, and reinforcement that they are their children's most influential educator and to instill in parents and children a pride in their cultural heritage."

With $275,000 in federal migrant-education funds, Families First provides four bilingual instructional assistants, a resource teacher-parent trainer, a home-school liaison, and a part-time program coordinator. Together, the team serves 163 preschoolers from about 130 families.

"Our primary objectives," says Garcia, "are to instill in parents the belief that what they have to offer their children is monumental; to create bicultural parent classes where parents are comfortable asking questions; and to emphasize that home is the most natural place for a child to learn —from learning how to classify by helping sort laundry to adding language richness by talking about the reasons colors change on the leaves they see on a drive to town."

Families First has three basic elements:

- Parent meetings
- Adult literacy requirements
- In-home, Spanish-language preschool

In addition, Families First collaborates with medical agencies to offer extensive health screening to identify and correct health problems of children in the program.

TWICE A MONTH, DOZENS OF MOTHERS AND FATHERS GATHER at the Gervais Elementary School for parent meetings. Bilingual sessions are held in the early evening and repeated the following morning, allowing flexibility for parents who work days or nights. Meetings feature presentations on topics such as the importance of reading to children or the basics of positive discipline. Sometimes, guests from the community speak—police officers, firefighters, health officials, or local elementary school principals. When possible, community representatives are Hispanic and/or bilingual. An employment official may discuss how to conduct a job search; a housing representative may talk about how to access subsidized homes. The aim is to demystify the system and help parents access services or feel comfortable in the elementary school their preschooler will attend. Parents are surveyed to determine topics of interest.

Families First also has special nights for fathers and children, featuring such activities as constructing a simple bird feeder or taking a field trip to a local swimming pool. Talent sharing is another popular activity. Parents may bring samples of favorite recipes or demonstrate how to change a tire or cut hair.

"One mother who felt like she didn't have any talent to demonstrate had decorated her home with beautiful hand embroidery," recalls Elvira Arce, a Families First instructional assistant. "I admired it during a home visit, and she said she'd done it herself. She shared it during the talent show, and you should have seen her face. Everybody went 'Wow!' and her self-esteem went way up. Even though she had had no formal education, she had a talent that others admired. And it made her child feel good to see how much everyone admired Mom."

Besides attending the twice-monthly meetings, one member of each family is required, as a condition of participation in the program, to take an adult literacy or GED class or other continuing education that will support and further develop the strength of the family. Instructional assistants help adults enroll. Families First developers believe that such classes help the parents become involved in the community, sets them as role models for their children, and instills pride in parents as they complete program components.

THE YELLOW MINIBUS NAVIGATES CAREFULLY DOWN THE GRAVEL DRIVEWAY to a tidy home where four-year-old Horacio marches out, arms swinging. His mother, holding a diapered infant, follows and exchanges pleasantries with Elvira Arce, the instructional assistant who also serves as bus driver. (Bus service helps families that can't provide transportation and gives youngsters a chance to learn bus safety.) After picking up four more youngsters—and talking with parents at each stop—Arce parks in front of a well-kept apartment where two tiny faces appear at the window. The apartment door flies open, and Arce shepherds in the fledglings from the bus. With the help of adults in the home, the group will spend the next two hours singing, counting, identifying colors, and undertaking other developmentally appropriate activities—all in Spanish.

While some parents initially object to Spanish education, language experts point out several reasons for learning first in the native language. For one, if young children learn English, they tend not to maintain or develop the language spoken at home, even if it is the only one their parents know. The result may be to jeopardize the parent-child relationship.

Another concern is that a child may learn only functional English. Before the age of five, children have not learned the complexity of language and have not learned abstract thought and the interaction between thinking and language. If a second language supersedes the native language too early, the youngster may gain only a functional command of the second language and enter school behind in development of both languages. As language complexity increases in higher grades, forming the basis for more challenging reading and writing tasks, middle school and high school students may find themselves unable to keep up. By first learning all the contextual richness of the native language, the child increases her or his command of the second language.

The Families First in-home preschool gives parents some direct experience with activities they can do with children in the home and helps prepare youngsters for their public school experience. Class size is kept to 10 or fewer children, who attend class two days every other week for two-hour sessions in the morning or afternoon. Each instructional assistant works with a total of 40 youngsters. Classes are held in different homes each week, and a parent or the child's caregiver participates in the activities. On alternate weeks, children work on take-home packets. Activities are carefully gauged to the developmental level of preschool children.

Instructional assistants take classes in developmentally appropriate education and return each year for three hours of continuing education on the topic. That helps them explain to parents the reasons behind what looks like play —that learning fine motor skills by stacking or lacing can help with writing later.

"If parents don't know this," says Arce, "they don't always see the value of the preschool activities." Parents are carefully drawn into the activities. Early in the year or on a first visit to a home, parents may help with minor tasks like supervising small groups of youngsters practicing cutting or gluing. Later, instructional assistants may ask parents to lead two or three children around the room identifying colors or shapes. Parents learn to ask open-ended questions along with strategies for incorporating what is being taught with day-to-day activities such as asking a child to count out five plates at dinnertime or patting out practice tortillas with a bit of scrap dough.

Equally important is culturally appropriate education. When Arce leads her flock into the house, she introduces each child to the grandfather and aunt who will help that day. Each child solemnly shakes hands with the adults.

"In Latino cultures," Garcia explains, "respect for elders is very important."

The aim of culturally appropriate education, according to a publication of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children*, is to enable every child to construct a knowledgeable and confident self-identity; to develop comfortable, empathetic, and just interaction with diversity; and to develop critical thinking and the skills to stand up for themselves in the face of injustice.

One of the strongest arguments for including culturally relevant education is to enhance a child's self-esteem. Learning is profoundly social and embedded in the home culture. While the dominant culture in most U.S. schools values logic and verbal skills, other cultures—while valuing language—may also emphasize reflection, with the result that speedy answers to questions are not considered socially acceptable.

"Everyone needs to feel psychologically safe and that their culture, their way of doing things, is valued and respected," says Dr. Rebecca Novick, who specializes in early childhood education at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. "A school's values and expectations can be so different from a child's culture that bridging that gap can be crucial to the child's success. Culturally relevant education does that by emphasizing shared experience."

But it's important to seamlessly incorporate culturally appropriate education rather than tacking it on as an afterthought—a practice dubbed "tourist multiculturism" by some for its emphasis on surface differences, such as holidays, between cultures. Ideas for genuinely incorporating multiculturism in the classroom include:

- Having dolls of different colors and storybooks in different languages
- Learning a few words in the child's language
- Using bilingual signs around the classroom
- Creating a bulletin board or class book for photographs of every student's family and captions describing the people and their relationships or activities
- Using contextual cues, such as

standing by the door when telling children to line up at the door

- Asking a child the Spanish word or phrase to express something
- Inviting Hispanic members of the community into the classroom to talk about their culture, not just obvious differences such as food, but also history and traditions

"One of the most important first steps for any of us," says Novick, "is to examine our own biases." Allowing and encouraging kids to talk about cultural differences and similarities—not minimizing the differences—is also important. If a child talks about the difference in skin color, talk about the differences in skin, hair color, eye color, height, weight, and other obvious physical differences. "The goal of culturally relevant teaching," Novick stresses, "is for a child to be fluent and comfortable in both cultures and to move back and forth easily between the two."

THE PRESCHOOL IS OFTEN THE SELLING POINT when parents are deciding whether to get involved with the Families First program. Once drawn in, however, many parents see the value of required parent meetings and literacy classes and enjoy participating. Families First found that even though the program provided refreshments for parent meetings, parents began bringing homemade goodies to show their appreciation for all they were learning.

"I like the parent meetings," says Letisia Reyes, mother of two youngsters in the program. "It's important to see what your kids are learning, and it's very important to get involved with our kids and hear what the teachers have to tell us. I learn a lot."

The offer of free preschool is a strong inducement for parents to get involved, but there are other ways to engage parents of any age child. The first step is to understand an important cultural difference. "We have to help (Hispanic) parents learn our educational system," says Espinoza, who taught for several years in Mexico. There, she says, parents considered the teacher and, by extension, the school to be the absolute authority. "I was a goddess," she says.

Espinoza believes that many Hispanic parents, even if they've lived for years in the United States, bring that assumption to the U.S. educational system, not realizing that their participation is expected and crucial to their child's success. Schools, too, she says, need educating about the differences in cultures. They need to understand that while Hispanic parents may not immediately become involved in their child's education, they still are concerned and interested. They may assume their participation would be seen as an attempt to usurp the school's role as sole educator. Helping them get involved shows them how important and valued their contributions are.

"All cultures value education," says Espinoza. "We have to help parents see that here they need to be involved in their child's education."

In addition to unfamiliarity with the U.S. school culture, Hispanic parents may feel shy about volunteering because of their own lack of education or limited English skills. The first step may be to reach out to those parents personally, ideally with a school staff member who is bilingual.

"If you want parents in the classroom," says Garcia, "you must meet them at the level they are on. Often families believe they have nothing to offer because they don't speak English. If they can't read English, ask them to share stories from their childhood. Or ask them to share a unique talent like ceramics or art or how to make tortillas. Start from the premise that parents have something valuable to offer, and approach them as equals. If you do that, you will attract parents."

Arce suggested that teachers may need to phone parents individually to invite them to an afterschool or evening meeting. They also may need to meet in the student's home to discuss with parents the importance of being involved in their child's education and to talk about ways they might feel comfortable helping. Teachers might suggest helping after school or in the family home to prepare supplies for activities later in the week, supervising on the playground, or helping on field trips.

Arranging carpooling or offering rides helps overcome transportation problems, and offering free child care at the meeting site resolves child-care dilemmas. Parents can rotate child-care duties, or parents not involved in the meeting may serve as volunteers.

With nearly two decades in the community, the Marion ESD is widely known for its Hispanic education programs. Still, outreach efforts continue. Staff members are part of the Hispanic community and frequently hear about prospective participants in informal ways. The program also relies on referrals from schools, local agencies involved in the Hispanic community, the county health department, and other parents. "It's not a once- or twice-a-year thing," says Espinoza. "We are constantly looking for participants."

Innovation is a constant theme with Families First. This year the program added a piece to help families make the transition to public schools. Each instructional assistant is mentoring one-to-one with parents whose children will be old enough for kindergarten the following year. With the help of the assistant, the parent meets with people in the school such as the principal, school secretary, kindergarten teachers, and bilingual staff, and compiles the information in a directory for personal use. In addition, the parent and instructor meet twice each month to talk about issues or problems. And Families First works with the child's prospective school to discuss transition issues.

Flexible, personal, innovative, and culturally sensitive—Families First lives up to its name. "Kindergarten teachers say these kids are prepared, ready for school with the skills they need to fit in and move along," says Espinoza. "And for parents it gives them a lot of useful information, accustoms them to going to school meetings, and gives them the self-confidence they need to get involved in school. Families First is making a tremendous difference."

Families First is producing a program video scheduled for release in April. For information, contact Families First, Marion ESD, 3400 Portland Road N.E., Salem, Oregon 97303, or call (503) 588-5361. The publication Anti-bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children *is available from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1509 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-1426.*

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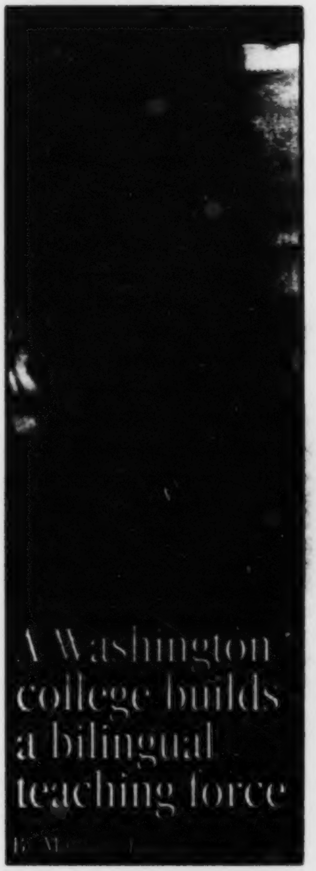

A Washington college builds a bilingual teaching force

By [illegible]

WENATCHEE, Washington— Below the multihued hills of Central Washington, Chelan County's orchards sleep quietly in December. The frosted winter branches of apple, pear, and cherry trees rise and spread like webs of crystal against a backdrop of oxidic red.

For decades, the fruits of these endless rows of trees have brought migratory laborers, mostly Hispanic, to the Wenatchee, Columbia, and Yakima valleys for the harvest. Once, those farmworkers moved on at harvest's end. While many still migrate with the seasons, others are settling into permanent jobs in communities up and down the valleys—Wenatchee and Wapato, Sunnyside and Pateros, Zillah and Brewster. As those families have settled, area schools have seen their Hispanic enrollments increase dramatically.

"One of the problems for Central Washington's school districts is that as the number of Hispanic students has increased over the years, we haven't had Hispanic teachers coming in at the same rate," says Dr. Ed Rousculp, chair of the department of undergraduate education at Heritage College in Toppenish, a few miles southeast of Yakima. In the past, he says, bilingual and bicultural teachers frequently were hired from Texas and other states, but lacking family ties and roots in the community, they seldom stayed.

The need for Spanish-speaking teachers in Central Washington's school districts was nearing crisis proportions in 1993. That's when the North Central Educational Service District (ESD), with financial support from the state education department, approached Heritage College for help in finding and certifying bilingual paraprofessionals in a teacher-training program called the Priority Hispanic Certification Program. The aim of the project was to certify paraprofessionals—parapros—who were already working in the schools as teacher's aides. This new cadre of educators would help fill the acute need for bilingual teachers in rural schools, where Hispanic children often struggle and frequently fail without help in overcoming language and cultural barriers.

Heritage College put out a call among Central Washington's school districts for bilingual paraprofessionals with an associate's degree or its equivalent who were interested in earning a bachelor's degree in elementary education along with an endorsement in bilingual education. When that original call didn't turn up enough qualified parapros, the college ran an ad in *El Mundo*, a local Spanish-language newspaper, and loosened the requirements to broaden the pool of applicants.

ONE RECENT DECEMBER SATURDAY, the 13 men and women who eventually enrolled in the program gather in the library in Wenatchee's Foothills Middle School. Despite the cold and grey outside, instructor Millie Watkins and her class are having a festive day. It's the last class of the quarter for Watkins' bilingual students. They have worked hard, and today they joke and laugh, reviewing what they've learned and taking stock of the circumstances that brought them to this classroom and, for several, to this country, some from as far away as Guatemala and Ecuador.

"I came to the USA following a dream to learn the English language," says Alfonso Lopez, a 33-year-old from Mexico who taught elementary school for five years before moving to the United States. "I did other jobs here—working in orchards and on a cattle ranch— but one day I decided to come back to school when I heard about this program."

For most of these students, 20 percent of tuition comes from the grant, and 40 percent comes from the school districts or education agencies that employ them. The balance is made up from various other financial-aid sources and from the students themselves, most of whom work full-time.

Lopez expresses his gratitude to Heritage for a program that is structured around the realities of working life. "We take classes on weekends," he says, " which is what we needed."

Although he had been a teacher in Mexico for five years, Lopez could not automatically become a professional teacher when he moved to the United States, even if he had been bilingual at the time. (Because a number of the program participants lacked English skills when they began, linguistic assistance was built into the program). As Watkins points out, the requirements for teacher certification differ greatly between the United States and Mexico, and transfer of certification is not automatic, no matter how much experience a teacher has.

"We're taking a skill that they already possess and building it into the American education system," says Watkins, who besides being an instructor is migrant education supervisor at the North Central ESD. "They already know what teaching is all about."

Lopez, who had earned a master's degree in social science from the Escuela Normal Superior de Oaxaca, was working as a manager on a cattle ranch in Ellensburg when he saw the newspaper ad. His original goal in coming to America had been to learn English so that he could teach a foreign language back home. But once he got here, he couldn't afford to attend classes. When he heard about the Priority program, Lopez quit his job and moved with his wife and two children to Wenatchee.

Not only was he accepted into the program, but he quickly landed a job as a teacher's aide at Wenatchee's Lincoln Elementary School, whose enrollment is nearly 45 percent percent Hispanic. Though Lopez and his classmates won't finish their two-and-a-half-year program until this summer, another Wenatchee school, Lewis and Clark Elementary—with 25 percent Hispanic students and in desperate need of a full-time bilingual teacher—has already offered him a teaching position.

Prospects look excellent for his classmates, too. "Administrators regularly call and ask 'when will those students be finished?'" says Rousculp.

Gioconda Jackson had been studying marketing when she left her native Ecuador to join her sister in Wenatchee, where she planned to finish her degree. Teaching had not been her goal, but, she says: "I saw kids who came from Mexico and knew nothing about English. I felt so sorry for them because I could see myself in them. So I put my marketing career aside and began to think about becoming a teacher."

The 32-year-old Jackson has been working toward her associate of arts degree and teacher certification while working for Watkins at the ESD. "It's been one of the biggest jobs of my life to go to class during my lunch hour to get my AA, and then to the school every weekend to get my certification," she says. "But I think it's worth it."

Jackson believes that the difficulty of being a Hispanic child in America's schools is underestimated. "Sometimes, we don't realize how much culture shock there is when kids move to the United States," she says. "Many people believe they just have to deal with the language. It's not true."

Jackson says children are under intense pressure not only to learn English and academic content but also to rapidly adapt to an alien culture. "It's more than just understanding English: It's understanding the way people live," asserts Jackson, who says her ability to empathize will be an asset. "I can understand their fears."

The Priority Hispanic Certification Program's mission of helping language-minority children ties in closely with the college's founding philosophy. Heritage, which grew out of a Native American outreach program of Fort Wright, a small Catholic liberal arts college in Spokane, is dedicated to bringing quality higher education to "diverse populations" in rural areas. Since its founding 14 years ago, the college has focused on addressing the educational needs of Central Washington adults who, because they are bound by work and family responsibilities to a rural locale, would otherwise be unable to pursue quality higher education. Since 1982, when 85 students attended classes in a caretaker's cottage or under a sycamore tree, the college has grown to serve more than 1,000 student at its 20 acres in Toppenish and at a satellite campus at Omak. Academic offerings include four master's programs in education.

DESPITE "GROWING UP," HERITAGE HAS RETAINED ITS PRIME DIRECTIVE. Of about 650 undergraduate students, more than half at the Toppenish campus are people of color: about 30 percent Hispanic and 20 percent Native American. Most are the first in their family to attend college. More than half fall below the poverty level. Many are farmworkers and single mothers. Women make up 70 percent of the student body, whose average age is 33.

To accommodate its student body, Heritage offers classes in many communities, often in the evening or on the weekend. On the same December Saturday that Millie Watkins meets with her Priority students in Wenatchee, for example, Dr. Yolanda Jaini, director of complex instruction at Heritage, is teaching an English as a Second Language (ESL) course across the Columbia River in East Wenatchee. The 10 graduate students are learning how to be innovators in conveying basic concepts to children whose English is weak or nonexistent. They experiment with ways of delivering instructions, often relying on visual presentations such as diagrams on computer screens. Jaini rarely lectures, more often giving her students key concepts and acting as a facilitator to draw from them the meaning and application of their lessons. During the process of encouraging students to find their own way through instruction—a method Jaini calls "scaffolding"—students receive support from the instructor, but only when they get stuck and only as much as they need to proceed independently. In this way, Jaini says, students assume more responsibility for their learning.

These classes, in which students learn from each other instead of receiving knowledge solely from the instructor, help build what Heritage and other progressive educational institutions call "learning communities." Students in a common field constitute "cohorts" or "cadres" that will go through the entire program together, forming networks that will extend beyond their education into their careers.

The Priority program and the regular curriculum at Heritage may have different immediate goals, but both will benefit children whose first or only language is something other than English. The graduate students' training in ESL is not finished once they complete the ESL class. Rather, effective methods of teaching language-minority students will be a recurring theme and a very substantial part of their education at Heritage, Jaini says.

DEALING WITH LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY in schoolchildren would not be such a big concern at Heritage if the solution were simply a matter of teaching English better or faster. But the issue goes much deeper than vocabulary, pronunciation, and syntax, according to Dr. Pat Whitfield, dean of the division of education and psychology at Heritage. "Teachers need to be looking at the whole child and not just how well he or she speaks English," she says. "The opportunity to read and write in their own language is what will enable them to excel later on. Every child has a culture that has worth. If a child's frame of reference is not the same as ours, we have to recognize what that frame of reference is."

Heritage has grown quickly, a fact that speaks to the ongoing needs of the communities it serves. Rousculp and Watkins would like to see the Priority program continue and certify another group of bilingual teachers. But for that to happen, a new base source of funding would have to be identified. Despite the continued need, Rousculp wants to be sure that by the time work is begun on funding another group of students, there will be a large and highly qualified pool of parapros to recruit. So for now, Alfonso Lopez, Gioconda Jackson, and their fellow students are a unique graduating class.

"It's a dream we will keep forever," says Jackson. "We will always have this."

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THE HISPANIC PRESENCE IN THE NORTHWEST DATES BACK SEVERAL CENTURIES to the 1500s when Spanish mariners began exploring and mapping the Pacific coast. A new book from the Oregon Council for the Humanities records Hispanics' far-reaching contributions to the social and economic history of Oregon, from those early explorations through the present day. Editors Erasmo Gamboa and Carolyn Buan write: "The Hispanic people of Oregon comprise a large, complex, and ongoing community that all Oregonians should better understand. Bilingual and multicultural, with roots in many other countries, theirs is now an Oregon story, extending from the earliest period of exploration and discovery to the present day."

Richly illustrated with photos and drawings, *Nosotros: The Hispanic People of Oregon* recounts the adventures of the early Spanish explorers and then goes on to tell the little-known story of the *vaqueros*—skilled Hispanic horsemen who helped establish the cattle ranches of Oregon's high desert in the 1800s. It describes the contribution of experienced Mexican mule-packers who brought food and supplies through the rugged territory to miners and other 19th-century settlers. It tells of the *braceros*—the Mexican farmworkers who worked under contract to the U.S. government to fill labor shortages during World War II.

The book then moves on to the struggles of migrant workers, from the Mexican-American civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s to the national and state legislative reforms of the 1980s. It discusses social policy; Spanish language rights and law; and Hispanic businesses, arts, and festivals. Profiles of Hispanic Oregonians give faces and names to the larger history.

"*Nosotros* presents a broad cultural tapestry of Oregon's Hispanic people, telling the story of our significant contributions to the quality of life in this state," says Felipe Veloz, past chair of the Oregon State Board of Education. "It is must reading for students and the general public."

Nosotros is available from the Oregon Council for the Humanities, 812 S.W. Washington Street, Suite 225, Portland, Oregon 97205. The cost is $16.95 if purchased at the council office and $18.95 if ordered by mail. The book is also available in bookstores for $21.95. Teachers may receive discounts for books purchased in quantity for classroom use. For more information, call (503) 241-0543.

SIX HISPANIC STUDENTS IN HERMISTON, under the direction of videomaker Brian Lindstrom, have produced an eight-minute documentary capturing the spirit of Eastern Oregon's Mexican-American community as embodied in custom and culture. The video, *I Feel Mexican Even Though I Was Born Here*, takes viewers into homes, businesses, and studios for an intimate introduction to Hermiston's Hispanic residents. As the camera rolls, a baker prepares traditional breads and pastries. Homemakers cook enchiladas. A potter crafts bowls of clay. A painter, a dance troupe, and a singer demonstrate their arts. A priest talks about an important religious festival. A woman sews a traditional Mexican dress. Another crafts a piñata.

"Today, the rhythms, the sounds, the celebrations, the foods, the arts, and the language of the Mexican people are very much a part of life in Hermiston," the student narrator tells viewers.

The video came about through the collaborative efforts of the Northwest Film Center, the Oregon Folk Arts Program, and the Hermiston School District. It is a product of the film center's statewide Video/Filmmaker-in-Schools program funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Oregon Arts Commission.

The video can be obtained from the Portland Art Museum's Northwest Film Center by calling (503) 221-1156 and asking for the education outreach coordinator. The video also can be obtained from the Oregon Folk Arts Program housed at the Oregon Historical Society. For information, call (503) 306-5292.

AN INFORMATION PACKET BRIMMING WITH VALUABLE RESOURCE LEADS is available from the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. Noting that the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 gives greater emphasis to "integrated and innovative programs that are effective in educating linguistically and culturally diverse students," the packet offers information on model programs that can help educators design and implement programs in their schools.

Among the items included are:

- Ordering information on projects of the Title VII (bilingual/ESL education) Academic Excellence Program. The projects demonstrate exemplary models for English language development; have proven to be effective; and are transportable and easily implemented in a wide variety of educational settings.
- Ordering information for *An Idea Book: Implementing Schoolwide Projects* (Title I).
- An overview and ordering information for *The Education of Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students: Effective Instructional Practices*.

To order the free *Information Packet: Effective Program Models*, compiled by Barbara Silcox and Kris Anstrom, call (800) 321-NCBE.

THE LAW IS CLEAR: SCHOOLS MUST GIVE LANGUAGE-MINORITY STUDENTS EQUAL ACCESS TO LEARNING. Merely seating a child in the classroom is a meaningless gesture if the child can't comprehend what's being taught, the Supreme Court ruled two decades ago in the landmark case *Lau vs. Nichols*.

But the hows of equal access have been left up to the schools. The Supreme Court offered some guidance in its 1981 decision in *Castaneda vs. Pickard*, ruling that a district's alternative language program must meet three tests:
(1) Is it based on an educational theory recognized as sound by at least some experts in the field?
(2) Are the programs and practices, including resources and personnel, reasonably calculated to implement this theory effectively?
(3) Does the district evaluate its program and make adjustments where needed to ensure language barriers are actually being overcome?

Still, there is no court mandate for choosing one program over another. As long as the program is "recognized as sound by at least some experts," it's acceptable. But expert opinion is mixed, and is further confounded by politics. The nation's current anti-immigrant climate—reinforced by the vocal and emotional English-only movement—makes it tough to objectively sort through the arguments, which tend to come from two camps: bilingual education advocates on one hand and English-language immersion advocates on the other. If a district opts for bilingual instruction, for example, how does it weigh the relative merits of transitional bilingual education and bilingual-bicultural maintenance, or make even finer distinctions between, say, early-exit and late-exit transitional bilingual programs?

Until recently, the research base on models for second-language acquisition added more confusion than clarity. Some studies on immersion programs, for instance, have focused on "Canadian-style immersion," which actually has a bilingual component and therefore can't be classified as pure immersion. Other studies have produced inconsistent or even contradictory findings that lend themselves to conflicting conclusions depending on who interprets the data.

Despite the sometimes-inconclusive data, a number of recent studies and syntheses by authoritative researchers and linguists have made solid findings in favor of teaching academic content in children's first language. There is a growing body of evidence to support the view that bilingual education models—particularly the "late-exit transitional," "bilingual-bicultural maintenance," and "developmental bilingual" models—hold the most promise for teaching English while letting language-minority kids catch up to their native-English peers.

THERE IS ONE POINT ON WHICH ALMOST EVERYONE AGREES: Submersion—tossing a non-English-speaking child into an English-only classroom without any assistance or accommodation for the language barrier—doesn't work and is unacceptable. In the "sink-or-swim" approach, most kids sink. But that's where agreement ends. Debate swirls around such questions as, Should language-minority children be taught in their first language? If so, how often and how long? What role should schools play in preserving the linguistic and cultural heritage of immigrant students? Can children who receive no instruction in their first language catch up and compete with their native English-speaking classmates?

Arguing that a school's goal should be to Americanize and acculturate immigrant children as quickly as possible, opponents of bilingual education contend that teaching children in their first language only delays the acquisition of English and postpones the day when they can join their peers in the mainstream classroom. "How years of being taught mostly in Korean, Spanish, or Portugese can produce rapid and effective learning of English is still a mystery and, in practice, an illusion," says one of bilingual education's most outspoken critics, Rosalie Pedalino Porter of the READ Institute, in an *Education Week* commentary published May 18, 1994.

The National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) takes exception to statements which, like Porter's, suggest that students in bilingual programs are taught "mostly" in their first language. This "often-heard claim is wholly refuted" by two U.S. Department of Education studies (including the Ramirez study discussed below) validated by the National Academy of Sciences, NABE asserts in its 1995 publication *Bilingual Education: Separating Fact from Fiction*. The studies found that transitional bilingual programs, where the goal is to move the child as quickly as possible into all-English classes, used English 65 percent of the time in kindergarten and, by fourth grade, 97 percent of the time. Even in developmental bilingual programs, where the goal is fluency in both languages, English was used more than half the time after second grade, the studies found.

Deep proficiency in a second language takes far longer to attain than surface fluency, researchers are finding. While it is true that Spanish-speaking and other immigrant children can pick up rudimentary English skills fast, the complexity of lunchroom or playground language doesn't approach the complexity of classroom language. "Many minority students can develop a relatively high degree of English communicative skills within about two years of exposure to English-speaking peers, television, and schooling," says Jim Cummins in *Bilingualism and Special Education: Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy* published by College Hill Press in 1984. "However, it is not valid to extrapolate from minority students' face-to-face conversational fluency to their overall proficiency in English.... A considerably longer period of time is required to learn sufficient English to perform at the same level in academic tasks as native English speakers than is usually required to converse fluently in face-to-face situations."

The speedy "Berlitz" approach to language instruction may equip the learner with linguistic survival skills, but it hardly prepares her to write a paper, for example, on the symbolism of the white whale in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, NABE notes. Such a paper requires complex cognitive skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation that are not necessary for ordering a Big Mac but are critical to school success.

Examining the school records of 42,000 language-minority students around the United States, researchers Virginia Collier and Wayne Thomas of George Mason University have found that in schools giving all-English instruction, students take five to 10 years to reach grade-level norms in English: seven to 10 years if they had no schooling in their native country, and five to seven years if they had some schooling (at least two or three years) before coming to the United States. In contrast, students schooled bilingually in the United States typically reach and surpass native speakers' performance after four to seven years.

"Our data show that extensive cognitive and academic development in students' first language is crucial to second-language academic success," the researchers write in "Second-Language Acquisition for School: Academic, Cognitive, Sociocultural, and Linguistic Processes" published in the *Georgetown University Round Table Proceedings* in December 1995. "Contrary to the popular idea that it takes a motivated student a short time to acquire a second language, our studies examining immigrants and language-minority students in many different regions of the U.S. and with many background characteristics have found that four to 12 years of second-language development are needed for the most advantaged students to reach deep academic proficiency and compete successfully with native speakers."

This recent study backs up findings of an earlier study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education to weigh the relative effectiveness of three program models for teaching Spanish-speaking students:

- Structured English immersion—All instruction is in English, with modifications in vocabulary and pacing so that academic subjects will be understood
- Early-exit transitional bilingual—Spanish is used for part of the day in grades K-2, and students are mainstreamed by the end of second grade
- Late-exit transitional bilingual—Spanish literacy is developed before introducing English literacy, and once English is initiated, about half of the instructional day is devoted to each language through sixth grade

Dubbed the "Ramirez study" for lead researcher J. David Ramirez of R.T. International, the study followed more than 2,000 students for four years, gathering information on child, family, classroom, teacher, school, district, and community. The data, published in 1991, documented that students need six or more years to learn a second language, Ramirez asserts in his executive summary, published in *Bilingual Research Journal*, Winter/Spring 1992. The data also lend support to the notion that the more instruction children get in their first language, the better they perform in their second.

Ramirez found that while children in all-English and bilingual programs showed comparable performance during the early elementary grades, the students in immersion and early-exit bilingual programs began lagging behind in later grades. Writes Ramirez: "Providing substantial instruction in the primary language appears to help LEP [limited-English-proficient] students catch up to their English-speaking peers in mainstream classrooms in English language, reading, and mathematics. In contrast, providing all instruction in English or with modest amounts of primary language instruction does not appear to help LEP students catch up to the norming population."

Collier and Thomas draw similar conclusions from their study: "From fourth grade on through middle school and high school, when the academic and cognitive demands of the curriculum increase rapidly with each succeeding year, students with little or no academic and cognitive development in their first language do less and less well as they move into the upper grades."

THE RAMIREZ AND COLLIER/THOMAS STUDIES REINFORCE EARLIER FINDINGS of Jim Cummins, who reported in the early 1980s that immigrant students who arrived in Canada at age six or seven took an average of five to seven years to match their English-speaking peers in English verbal and academic skills. Notes Cummins: "The fact that immigrant students require, on the average, five to seven years to approach grade norms in L2 [second-language] academic skills, yet show peer-appropriate L2 conversational skills within about two years of arrival, suggests that conversational and academic aspects of language proficiency need to be distinguished."

For one thing, academic tasks are often abstract and removed from the student's immediate surroundings or experiences. Cummins makes a distinction between "context-embedded" and "disembedded" thought. The cues students use to make sense of talk—the sights and sounds and signals that provide context for spoken language—are often reduced in the academic environment, he notes.

Cummins, Collier, and others have argued that the higher-order thinking skills and deeper conceptual abilities students need as they progress in school are best acquired in the child's first language. "With each succeeding grade, academic work (in language arts, math, science, and social studies) gets cognitively more complex," Collier writes. "Academic knowledge and conceptual development transfer from first language to second language; thus, it is more efficient to develop academic work through students' first language, while teaching second language during other periods of the school day through meaningful academic content.

"In early decades in the U.S.," she continues, "we emphasized teaching second language as the first step, and postponed the teaching of academics. Research has shown us that postponing or interrupting academic development in first and second languages is likely to produce academic failure."

Besides allowing language-minority students to develop deeper cognitive skills in their first language, then, bilingual instruction lets students advance quickly in math, science, history, and other academic subjects at the same time that they are mastering English. In a 1994 report to the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, the U.S. General Accounting Office supports this notion, saying, "Bilingual instruction allows for more detailed and richer coverage of academic subjects because it facilitates a faster pace and allows more examples to be used."

BILINGUAL EDUCATION CAN TAKE MANY SHAPES. It can be a short-term tool for moving students quickly into mainstream classrooms, as in the "early-exit transitional" programs studied by Ramirez where second-language instruction is phased out by third grade. The "late-exit" model—which retains second-language instruction through sixth grade and which Ramirez found to be more effective than early-exit—is also a transitional approach, with an emphasis on replacing students' first language with their second. But late-exit models come closer to developmental bilingual and bilingual-bicultural maintenance models, which seek to retain and build upon the child's first language while developing the second.

In distinguishing between developmental/maintenance and transitional models, some researchers note that one approach is "additive," the other "subtractive." A number of educators and linguists have pointed out the irony of supplanting the language skills children bring to school. Paraphrasing Professor Mary Ashworth of the University of British Columbia, Jim Cummins notes in *Empowering Minority Students* published by the California Association for Bilingual Education in 1989: "The roots of the term education imply drawing out children's potential, making them more than they were; however, when children come to school fluent in their primary language and they leave school monolingual in English, then our schools have negated the meaning of the term education because they have made children less than they were."

It is around this issue—the role schools should play in preserving and nurturing children's language and cultural identity—that the bilingual debate ultimately turns. Critic Rosalie Pedalino Porter argues that schools' job is to instill English skills, not preserve culture. "Let us not confuse the private freedom to use any language at home and keep any cultural traditions, which rights we all have, with the priorities and responsibilities of public education," she writes. "Families or groups that choose to retain language and culture may promote after-school programs or private language schools, but such preservation cannot be a responsibility of the public schools with their limited resources and broader responsibilities."

Such arguments, however, ignore what we know: that cultural identity is closely linked to self-esteem, and self-esteem is tied to academic achievement. Another link that is clearly established in the research literature is the connection between parental involvement and student outcomes. Without honoring a child's language and culture, schools cannot hope to draw language-minority parents into the educational process, and without such involvement, children's chances for success diminish. Notes Cummins: "There is considerable evidence that academic progress is facilitated by means of programs that strongly reinforce students' cultural identity."

THE SPOKEN AND UNSPOKEN MESSAGES EDUCATORS COMMUNICATE to children about the value of their language and their culture are a critical part of what Virginia Collier terms the "sociocultural processes" that affect how well children learn and, ultimately, how far they go in school and beyond. Sociocultural processes include such factors as students' self-esteem, the instructional milieu (for instance, is it cooperative or competitive?), majority-minority relations in the school, and prejudice in the community.

Notes Collier: "Sociocultural processes strongly influence, in both positive and negative ways, students' access to cognitive, academic, and language development. It is crucial that educators provide a socioculturally supportive school environment that allows natural language, academic, and cognitive development to happen."

The instructional milieu is one sociocultural factor that teachers can affect directly. There is strong evidence that second-language students thrive in classrooms where "interactive/experiential approaches to pedagogy" are the norm, in Cummins' words. Significantly, these practices—whole language, cooperative learning, discovery learning, problem solving—are the same practices that educational researchers are finding work best with all children. But too often, minority-language students instead wind up on unchallenging, remedial tracks that present a watered-down curriculum with a fill-in-the-blanks approach.

Collier and Thomas distinguish between what they call "traditional" and "current" methods of language teaching.

"Students do less well in programs that focus on discrete units of language taught in a structured, sequenced curriculum with the learner treated as a passive recipient of knowledge," they say in their report *Research Summary of Study in Progress: Results as of September 1995*. "Students achieve significantly better in programs that teach language through cognitively complex academic content in math, science, social studies, and literature, taught through problem-solving, discovery learning in highly interactive classroom activities. ESL pull-out in the early grades, taught traditionally, is the least successful program model for students' long-term success."

Collier and Thomas go on to note that certain program characteristics can make a "significant difference" in academic achievement for students entering U.S. schools at the secondary level when first-language instructional support cannot be provided. They are: teaching second language through academic content; teaching learning strategies that develop thinking skills and problem-solving abilities; and supporting continuous staff development with an emphasis on activation of students' prior knowledge, respect for students' home language and culture, intense and meaningful cognitive/academic development, and ongoing assessment using multiple measures.

STUDENT EMPOWERMENT SHOULD BE THE LONG-TERM GOAL OF ANY PROGRAM for language-minority students, in Cummins' view. "Educators who see their role as adding a second language and cultural affiliation to students' repertoire," he says, "are likely to empower students more than those who see their role as replacing or subtracting students' primary language and culture in the process of teaching English and assimilating students to the dominant culture."

Cummins is careful to note, however, that the "additive orientation" can exist whether or not bilingual instruction is possible or practical. Reinforcing Collier's emphasis on the importance of a supportive sociocultural environment to children's achievement, Cummins says in his article "Empowering Minority Students: A Framework for Intervention" published by *Harvard Educational Review* in February 1986: "Educators communicate to students and parents in a variety of ways the extent to which students' language and culture is valued within the context of the school. Even within a monolingual school context, powerful messages can be communicated to students regarding the validity and advantages of language development."

NOTE: The research findings of Collier and Thomas summarized in the working paper, Research Summary of Study in Progress: Results as of September 1995, *cited above, can be found in an article to be published this year by the* Bilingual Research Journal. *Also see the article "Second-Language Acquisition for School: Academic, Cognitive, Sociocultural, and Linguistic Processes" in the* Georgetown University Round Table Proceedings, *December 1995.*

—Lee Sherman Caudell

Different Educational Strategies for Instructing Limited-English-Proficient Students

Several basic strategies are used for instructing Limited-English-Proficient (LEP) students. In practice they often are combined in a variety of ways.

Transitional Bilingual Education	An instructional program in which subjects are taught in two languages—English and the native language of LEP students—and English is taught as a second language. Bilingual programs emphasize the development of English-language skills as well as grade promotion and graduation requirements. These programs are designed to enable LEP students to make a transition to an all-English program of instruction while receiving academic subject instruction in the native language to the extent necessary. Transitional bilingual education programs vary in the amount of native language instruction provided and the duration of the program.
Developmental Bilingual Programs	Programs in which native-English-speaking and LEP students receive instruction in both English and the native language of the LEP students, with the goal of bilingual literacy for both groups.
Bilingual-Bicultural Maintenance	A program that uses two languages, the student's primary language and English, as a means of instruction. The instruction builds upon the student's primary language skills and develops and expands the English language skills of each student to enable him or her to achieve competency in both languages.
English as a Second Language	A teaching approach in which LEP students are instructed in the use of the English language. Their instruction is based on a special curriculum that typically involves little or no use of their native language and is usually taught only in specific school periods. For the rest of the school day, the students may be placed in regular (or submersion) instruction, an immersion program, or a bilingual program.
Immersion	A general term for teaching approaches for LEP students that do not involve using a student's native language. Three variations are the following:
Sheltered English (Sheltered Subject Matter Teaching)	A method characterized by the use of simplified vocabulary and sentence structure to facilitate understanding of the regular curriculum for LEP students. Teachers use slower, more concise speech, with increased wait time after posing questions. In addition, teachers make instruction more visual by using "realia" (objects and activities related to real life), manipulatives, pictures, and charts to provide comprehensible (visual/concrete) input.
Structured Immersion	A method that involves teaching in English, but with several differences from submersion: the teacher understands the native language, and students may speak it to the teacher, although the teacher generally answers only in English. Knowledge of English is not assumed, and the curriculum is modified in vocabulary and pacing, so that the academic subjects will be understood. Some programs include some language arts teaching in the native language.
Submersion	Placing LEP students in ordinary classrooms in which English is the language of instruction. Students receive no special programs to help them overcome their language barriers, and their native language is not used in the classroom. Also called "sink or swim," submersion was found unconstitutional in the Supreme Court's decision in *Lau vs. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974).

SOURCE: *A Growing and Costly Educational Challenge Facing Many School Districts.* U.S. General Accounting Office, January 1994.

HIGH SIGHTS

Linking LEP programs to systemic reform helps ensure inclusion

IMAGINE A SCHOOL SYSTEM AS AN INTRICATE FABRIC OF PEOPLE, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES. Then consider that in most school systems, language-minority students are woven into the margins of the cloth—if they are woven in at all.

"Programs to address their unique needs tend to be ghettoized—if not physically, then in administrators' attitudes and practices," note Diane August, Kenji Hakuta, and Delia Pompa in *For All Students: Limited English Proficient Students and Goals 2000*, published by the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education in 1994. "Large numbers of limited-English-proficient children continue to receive instruction that is substandard to what English speakers receive. This amounts to a two-tiered system of education, with challenging curriculum for some and mediocrity for the rest."

In another paper from the National Clearinghouse, *Implementing Bilingual Programs is Everybody's Business*, Toni Greigo-Jones charges many schools with "housing two schools"—one for language-minority kids, the other for mainstream kids—in one building. The paper, published in 1995, deplores the "isolation" and "lack of connection" this duality creates for language-minority students.

But she and other advocates for language-minority children see promise in what has become the rallying cry of educators, commentators, and policymakers engaged in school improvement: systemic reform. This she defines as a "holistic approach to reform and change, one that involves all stakeholders and affects all aspects of schooling." Returning to the school-system-as-fabric analogy, educational reform can be seen as the process of recreating the cloth. Systemic reform, rather than patching or mending, shuttles each and every thread through the loom anew, leaving no loose strands. Programs for language-minority students, in this all-encompassing approach to school change, aren't tacked on but woven in.

"Reorienting American schools away from old assumptions—that minority children can learn only basic skills and that bilingualism is a handicap to be overcome—will require a comprehensive approach," August and her colleagues insist. "Reform must be systemic in nature."

So far, they add, "the reform movement has generally sidestepped the particular conditions, needs, and strengths of limited-English-proficient children." Systemic reform hinges on the conviction that academic success belongs not only to kids who live on suburban cul-de-sacs, but also to kids who live in gangland tenements. And to kids who live in remote farmhouses. And to kids who can't scrape up the dollar for a school lunch. Systemic reform rests on the belief that educators must hold high expectations not only for children whose parents speak English, but also for children whose parents speak Spanish and Russian and Hmong.

THESE IDEAS—HIGH SIGHTS, SEISMIC CHANGE— underpin two key pieces of federal legislation that are shaping the way states and districts tackle reform and address the needs of language-minority students: the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Goals 2000.

The reauthorized ESEA, the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, reduces fragmented services by letting districts blend some pots of money once earmarked for narrowly defined populations. The beefed-up coordination and combined resources that result when schools link programs for disadvantaged, migrant, and language-minority students, for example, benefit all targeted kids. When services are fragmented, as they too often have been in the past, "resources are dispersed, children's needs are only partially addressed, and no one is held fully accountable," August notes.

The legislation also makes more money and services available for limited-English-proficient children by loosening restrictions on Title I eligibility. Before, limited-English-proficient (LEP) kids couldn't get Title I services (special help for disadvantaged students) if their main educational roadblock was language. Now, they can. The rural Santiam Canyon School District in Oregon, for example, is taking advantage of the new flexibility in federal funding. The district's migrant, bilingual, and Title I staff are engaged in joint planning and resource sharing across programs. After all, Title I Coordinator Monica Lawson observes, "Our kids aren't in separate packages."

At the same time that language-minority students are being brought into the Title I fold, Title I programs are expanding to embrace whole schools and districts.

"When large portions of students in a school are in need, the best way to upgrade the educational experience for those students is to improve the program for the entire student body," August, Hakuta, Pompa, and Fernando Olguin note in *LEP Students and Title I: A Guidebook for Educators* published by Stanford University in November 1995. "Schoolwide programs provide a vehicle for much-needed reform in that regular classroom instruction, rather than supplemental and pull-out instruction, becomes the focus for improving outcomes for students."

Language-minority students stand to benefit from schoolwide Title I programs, August and her colleagues argue, because such students tend to be concentrated in high-poverty schools. But here's where educators encounter a dilemma: how to restructure the whole without short-changing the parts. Traditionally, most U.S. schools have taken one of two tacks: They have banished language-minority students to pull-out programs or thrown them into the mainstream classroom to sink or swim on their own. The U.S. Department of Education, with backing from the Supreme Court, has judged both approaches—segregation and submersion—illegal. So schools must walk a precarious line between the two extremes. They must blend language-minority students into the overall school program at the same time they attend to those students' special needs.

Some segregation is OK, but only when the benefits to students outweigh the detriments, the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has said. Whatever program the school or district chooses—ESL, transitional bilingual education, developmental bilingual education, or some other strategy or combination of strategies—it must be carried out in the "least segregative manner" possible, Michael Williams, the assistant secretary for civil rights told OCR staff in a 1991 memo. Segregating students for both academic and nonacademic subjects such as recess, PE, art, and music is one practice that could violate antisegregation laws. Another is keeping students in alternative language programs longer than necessary to achieve program goals.

The Goals 2000: Educate America Act is the other key piece of legislation that bodes well for language-minority children. Goals 2000 codifies the eight national education goals into law and offers funding to states for systemic reform. The act is specific about which students should reach the high standards set forth in the goals: all of them. It defines "all students" as "students from a broad range of backgrounds and circumstances, including, among others, students or children with limited English proficiency." In explaining how statewide reform efforts will improve schools, states must detail how targeted groups such as disadvantaged students, LEP students, and migrant students will benefit.

"LINKING LEP SERVICES TO BROADER, SYSTEMIC REFORM SHOULD HELP ASSURE THAT THESE STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN AND BENEFIT FROM SUCH REFORM," the U.S. General Accounting Office notes in a 1994 report, ***Limited English Proficiency: A Growing and Costly Educational Challenge Facing Many School Districts***. Eight U.S. schools featured in a new report from the National Clearinghouse on Bilingual Education have made this link successfully. In so doing, they have found fertile middle ground between segregation and submersion, where language-minority students can thrive.

"At all of the exemplary schools, the program for LEP students is an integral part of the entire school's restructuring effort," writes Beverly McLeod in *School Reform and Student Diversity: Exemplary Schooling for Language Minority Students* published in 1995. "It is neither conceptually nor physically separate from the rest of the school. . . .The exemplary schools have devised creative ways to both include LEP students centrally in the educational program and meet their needs for language instruction and modified curriculum."

In fact, McLeod notes, at these schools, programs for language-minority students "are so carefully crafted and intertwined with the school's other offerings that it is impossible in many cases to point to 'the LEP program' and describe it apart from the general program.

"At the exemplary schools," McLeod reports, "English language proficiency is not the great dividing line that it is at many schools."

The eight elementary and middle schools described in the report, identified by a nationwide search conducted by the National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning, "operate on the premise that students are able to participate fully in challenging academic work despite their limited English skills," McLeod writes. The study, funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, sought to identify, describe, and analyze exemplary school reform efforts for LEP students in grades four through eight in three curricular areas: language arts, science, and math.

Here's a sampling, in McLeod's words, of effective practices these schools have devised:

- Many of the exemplary schools organize students into larger-than-class groupings such as "families," "houses," "wings," or paired classes. Within these larger units, students can be grouped in various ways for different instructional purposes. For example, each seventh-grade "family" at a middle school might include about 25 LEP students and 60 English-proficient students. The LEP students might be instructed in social studies in a self-contained sheltered or bilingual instructional format, but be integrated with English-proficient students in science classes. These kinds of creative groupings give schools the ability to include all students by sometimes mixing different (language and ability) groups heterogeneously, and sometimes dividing them for instruction geared to their particular needs.
- Teachers guide students into collaborative learning by making extensive use of cooperative work groups. The use of cooperative groups is particularly valuable for LEP students for several reasons. If their group includes a native language mate whose English is more proficient, they can get immediate clarification if they don't understand what is being said. Even if no peer translator is available, LEP students working with other students on a common task are more likely to be able to understand and participate than if they struggled alone to comprehend directions from a teacher or textbook. LEP students in cooperative groups are also given many opportunities for exactly the kind of informal, face-to-face conversation that can strengthen their English skills and their sociolinguistic competence.
- While English acquisition and literacy development are viewed by the exemplary schools as primary goals for LEP students, an equally important objective is engaging in challenging work in other academic disciplines. These schools subscribe to the notion that all students are capable of a high level of serious scholarship, and they offer a rigorous curriculum to all students, regardless of their English language ability. A class of fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-graders at one school uses laptop computers and Hypercard software to produce multimedia book reports. Middle school students at another school conduct scientific investigations of water quality and ant behavior.
- The schools make meaningful connections across academic disci-

Sources of Assistance in Designing Programs for Language-Minority Students

Northwest Regional Assistance Center

In keeping with education's new emphasis on systemic reform, integrated services, and integrative curriculum, schools receiving federal dollars to serve special student populations can turn for help to a network of new "megacenters" offering one-stop assistance. The U.S. Department of Education has created 15 regional comprehensive technical assistance centers to provide training and technical assistance encompassing Title I, Indian, migrant, bilingual, and drug education—categories formerly served by separate assistance centers in each region. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, in partnership with the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and Salish-Kooteni Community College, has been designated to operate the center serving the states of Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. The Lab will also assist the center serving Alaska, operated by the South East Regional Resource Center in Juneau. For information, call Director Carlos Sundermann at (503) 275-9479.

Center for National Origin, Race, and Sex Equity

As the federally funded desegregation assistance center for Region X, operated by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, the equity center assists Northwest schools with preparing and implementing desegregation plans; identifying and promoting awareness of biased and discriminatory actions; eliminating use of biased textbooks and materials; and developing procedures for nondiscriminatory student placement, among other services. Services aimed specifically at improving educational opportunities for language-minority children fall into such categories as language assessment, instructional program development, community support, staff recruitment, parent and student communication, and testing procedures. For information, call Director Joyce Harris at (503) 275-9664.

Office for Civil Rights, Region X, U.S. Department of Education

The Office for Civil Rights investigates allegations of civil rights violations and initiates investigations of compliance with federal civil rights laws in schools. Equity for limited-English-proficient students is a priority area. In response to requests from school districts for help in designing plans for better serving language-minority students, the office has developed an outline of a model plan. The model plan spells out the elements that an alternative language program must include to meet federal guidelines. It also includes a glossary of terms, a policy update, several flow charts, sample home-language surveys, a chart of exit criteria, and an assessment tool, among other materials. For information, call Patricia Yates at the Region X office in Seattle, (206) 220-7924.

State Education Agencies

Under the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, state education departments must help each school and district affected by the state school improvement plan to develop the capacity to comply with school improvement requirements, targeted assistance, and schoolwide requirements. Assistance should include: School Support Teams to provide help to schoolwide programs and, if funds are sufficient, to high-poverty schools or schools in need of improvement; Distinguished Schools that serve as models and provide support to other schools; Distinguished Educators to provide intensive and sustained help to the schools and districts furthest from meeting the state's student performance standards and to schoolwide programs. For information, call the compensatory education specialist at your state education department.

National Resources

- The Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs of the U.S. Department of Education will help states identify appropriate assessment measures for Title I students in languages other than English. For information, call (202) 205-9157.
- The Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning, through funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, has developed a school improvement system specifically focused on limited-English-proficient students. To order *Effective Schooling for Second Language Learners: A School Assessment System* by D.L. August and C. Pease-Alvarez, call (202) 429-9292.
- The National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education is creating a database of persons who speak a language other than English who are willing to serve as resources to schools. The clearinghouse will be working with comprehensive technical assistance centers to provide this information to schools. For information call (800) 321-NCBE.

plines. Their curricula reflect the kind of integration, depth, and hands-on approaches recommended by educators to guide students into critical thinking and complex understanding.

- Students are encouraged to use language meaningfully. This means allowing them to use their native language to ask or answer questions when they are unable to do so in English.

THE SHIFT IN THINKING THAT SYSTEMIC REFORM REQUIRES is a shift from seeing children's differences as negatives to seeing them as pluses. In current reform lingo, it means moving from a "risk" model to a "resiliency" model. In a 1995 position paper, *Educational Reform and Its Effect on Migrant Education*, Oregon's Migrant Education Service Center points out that the migrant lifestyle, usually viewed as an educational deficit, actually fosters multilingualism, adaptability, cultural understanding, appreciation for the value of work and family, and a sense of responsibility—strengths that schools can and should build on.

The new federally funded Northwest comprehensive technical assistance center operated by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory will help schools move from risk to resiliency, from fragmentation to unification, from tracking to inclusion. The center's focus, says Director Carlos Sundermann, will be on "changing the mind-set of school and community collaborators from viewing language- and ethnic-minority students and their families as problems to looking at national heritage, culture, and customs as resources for the further exploration and growth of all children and teachers." ■

Citizens

Continued from page 17

"Almost everything revolves around the hub."

Welcoming parents into the schools and inviting them to take part in their children's education has been a big step toward folding the newcomers into the mainstream of canyon life, White says. "Through ESL and Title I, the school district has played a large role in making the Hispanics feel the community cares about them and is doing something for them," he notes. "For most people, the education of their children is the most important thing. If their children are getting a good education, they won't feel like outcasts in the community."

Maria Martinez is one of the critical points of connection between the schools and Spanish-speaking parents. In her role as bilingual classroom aide, she translates printed information for parents and interprets at parent-teacher conferences. Father-of-four Sergio Sandoval, who was a California farmworker before taking a mill job in the canyon two years ago, found an important ally in Martinez. Sandoval says that when his son was falling behind in class because of health problems or when his daughter failed to get proper recognition for schoolwork she had done, he approached Martinez to bring his concerns to the teachers. "Someone needs to translate," he says. "Someone needs to be the liaison."

The True Value hardware store on Highway 22 is a place where nearly everyone up and down the Santiam Canyon stops sooner or later. Owner Tim Kirsch, who grew up in the canyon, hears a pretty good sampling of community opinions when folks come in shopping for paint or nails.

"You do hear the bigoted slurs now and then," Kirsch admits. "But," he's quick to add, "a lot of it isn't hate-oriented—it's just people talking." He thinks such sentiments are the inevitable growing pains of a community making a rapid transition from uniformity to diversity.

Hispanic families, a rarity in the canyon when Kirsch was in school 20 years ago, now have "a good stronghold in the community," he reports. But he insists that rather than threatening the jobs of locals, as some residents claim, the Spanish-speaking workers are "filling in slack areas" that the local workforce can't or won't fill.

Adds Kirsch wistfully: "I wish I were bilingual. Our client base has a lot of Hispanics."

It's the new reality in the Santiam Canyon, and it's being played out in rural communities everywhere. It's being embraced by people like Arnie White, who's delighted when his five-year-old comes home from kindergarten spouting a new Spanish word. And this expanding multicultural world is being addressed by companies like Freres Lumber, which is collaborating with the community college to enroll its Hispanic millworkers in English classes so they can leave the green chain for more demanding slots.

Like White and Freres Lumber, Tim Kirsch is seeing the future—a future nearly upon us, when commerce and communication cut across cultures, not just in the population centers of Portland and Seattle but in the remotest farmlands and river canyons of the Northwest. ■

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GIVING PARENTS A MEANINGFUL ROLE IN SCHOOL, making them feel welcome, and keeping them informed are tough enough when all players share the same language and culture. But what if parents speak a different language than school staff? What if getting involved in their child's school would be considered inappropriate meddling in their native country? What if they haven't set foot in a school since third grade and feel fearful and intimidated about approaching teachers or administrators?

These are the linguistic and cultural hurdles that Sunnyside School District recently set out to jump. In the past decade, Hispanic enrollment at this district near Yakima in the heart of Washington's fruit-growing region swelled from less than half to almost three-quarters of total enrollment. With funding from both private and public sources, the district has launched several programs to bring the rising population of Hispanic parents into the schools and into the educational lives of their children.

One project—Parent Effective Leadership Training (PELT), modeled after a program developed for urban Black parents—provides in-home support for literacy development and trains parents in school and community leadership. Through the program's literacy piece, "Backpack Literacy," a school staff member visits homes where young children live, toting in a knapsack a tape recorder and a Spanish-language book in both print and audio versions. An English version of the book is introduced the following week. The idea, says Sunnyside's parent involvement coordinator Sara Vega-Evans, is for parents to read with their kids and for the parent and child to learn language and literacy skills together.

The leadership piece of PELT is a six-week training program conducted in the parents' language that covers leadership skills; avenues for parental involvement in school; stages of child development; communication differences between U.S. and Latin cultures; the structure and chain of command in the U.S. educational system; and goal setting. To graduate from the program, parents must finish all six weeks of training, plus attend a school board meeting and spend at least an hour volunteering in the schools.

About 1,000 parents have taken part in the program since it began three years ago, and 75 parents have graduated and received a certificate of completion—a big boost for the self-esteem of these parents, many of whom have only a third-grade education or less, says Vega-Evans.

"Before PELT, we had a heck of a time getting parents involved in the schools," she notes. "They would say, 'But I don't speak English. How can I be involved?' Now there are no more excuses."

One big barrier is the cultural difference between U.S. and Latin countries with regard to parents' proper role in formal education. "Once we send the child to school, the teacher becomes the father, the mother, the counselor, and everything else," says Vega-Evans of attitudes in her native El Salvador. PELT shows Hispanic parents that not only are they welcome in U.S. schools, but they also can be an important role model and helper for their child.

THERE HAVE BEEN A LOT OF SPIN-OFF BENEFITS, Vega-Evans says. The training has given many parents the confidence to go back to school and take GED and ESL classes. Some are taking free computer classes at the district. A parent support group to discuss personal issues has grown out of the training program. And several program graduates have been recruited for various advisory groups, including the state-level parent advisory council.

The state education department, which funded the PELT program through a state Readiness-to-Learn grant, is considering the project as a model for statewide implementation, says Vega-Evans, who is writing a training manual for facilitators.

ANOTHER INNOVATION IN THE SUNNYSIDE DISTRICT came out of Washington Elementary School, a K-2 school whose Hispanic enrollment is approaching 80 percent. Supported by a project of the Rural Clearinghouse for Lifelong Education and Development called EMPIRE (Exemplary Multicultural Practices in Rural Schools), the school created a bilingual handbook that cuts across linguistic and cultural barriers to include and inform Spanish-speaking parents. Goals of the parent handbook are several:

- To demonstrate the school's commitment to reach out and involve all parents and community members
- To raise awareness among school staff of the need for a multicultural perspective
- To show the school's desire to adapt to the changing needs of the community
- To communicate to all parents the school's belief that learning continues at home

The Guia Escolar Para Padres (Parent Handbook)—printed on hot pink, purple, and teal paper—contains information on attendance policies, open-house dates, testing, report cards, special programs, PTA meetings, safety procedures, supplies, and other school-related topics. Also included are tips on how parents can help their children succeed in school.

"Many of our children are the children of settled migrants," notes Assistant Principal Diann Zavala. "More and more, our parents are coming in speaking only Spanish. For many of them, it's the first time they've been involved in the U.S. school system. We needed some form of communication—something to hand parents that would serve as a guide to the school."

The district's middle school and another elementary school have developed bilingual handbooks, too, and the district has produced a bilingual school calendar. The handbooks and calendar, says Zavala, are just one outcome of districtwide multicultural training aimed at getting away from the "tourist approach" to cultural awareness and moving instead toward deeper understanding, interaction, and communication.

Meeting the needs of Hispanic parents is, in turn, just one facet of a larger five-year districtwide strategic improvement plan, now in its fourth year.

Although Sunnyside is no longer participating in the EMPIRE project, 10 other Yakima Valley schools, along with Heritage College in Toppenish (see Page 29), are involved in the project. Originally funded by the Ford Foundation, the project is now jointly funded by Heritage and participating schools. For more information, contact Bertha Ortega, Assistant Vice President for Community Relations at Heritage College, (509) 865-2244.

For further information on Sunnyside School District's programs for involving Hispanic parents, contact Sara Vega-Evans at (509) 837-0554.

—Lee Sherman Caudell

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Mid Kids
Learning in the Middle Years

- Life Studies at George Middle School
- High Tech, Low Tech in Missoula
- Job Shadowing in the Real World
- What Middle Schoolers Say
- Team Teaching in Idaho
- Research on Middle Level Education

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COVER PHOTO: STEPHANIE GILLS, A SIXTH-GRADE STUDENT AT GEORGE MIDDLE SCHOOL IN PORTLAND, OREGON, SHOWS OFF BIG BEN, ONE OF THE CREATURES THAT INHABIT THE SCHOOL'S ANIMAL LAB. PHOTOGRAPHED BY RICK STIER, LONE PINE PHOTOGRAPHY, PORTLAND, OREGON.

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The Wonder Years? Well, Sort Of

Think back, for a moment, to the time when you were a young adolescent. For many of us, it was a time of unbridled enthusiasm, explosive physical growth, emotional turmoil, sexual stirrings, unlimited curiosity, and extreme confusion.

It was a time for experimentation, for risk-taking, for wing-spreading, and for wanting desperately to be treated as an adult while acting, well, like an obnoxious know-it-all. With all the changes in our lives, it's not surprising that many of us ranged from mediocre-minus to mediocre-plus. We'd show occasional signs of brilliance, then bumble for long stretches into some bone-headed endeavor.

Ahhhh. The middle years. The wonder years. The range of the strange. Walking hormones. Harleys in heat. It's a time that parents hope passes quickly and safely. We forget what it was like to be that age, or remember it all too well. We sometimes fear that aliens have inhabited the bodies of our sons and daughters.

It really is hard to understand the changes and complexities of the middle years once we've passed through them.

"Young people undergo more rapid and profound personal changes during the years between 10 and 15 than at any other period of their lives," write the authors of *This We Believe*, the National Middle School Association's manifesto on middle school education. "Although growth in infancy is also very extensive, infants are not the conscious witnesses of their development as are young adolescents. These developmental processes, while natural and necessary, often constitute challenges for youngsters as well as for their teachers, parents, and others entrusted with responsibility for their healthy development and education."

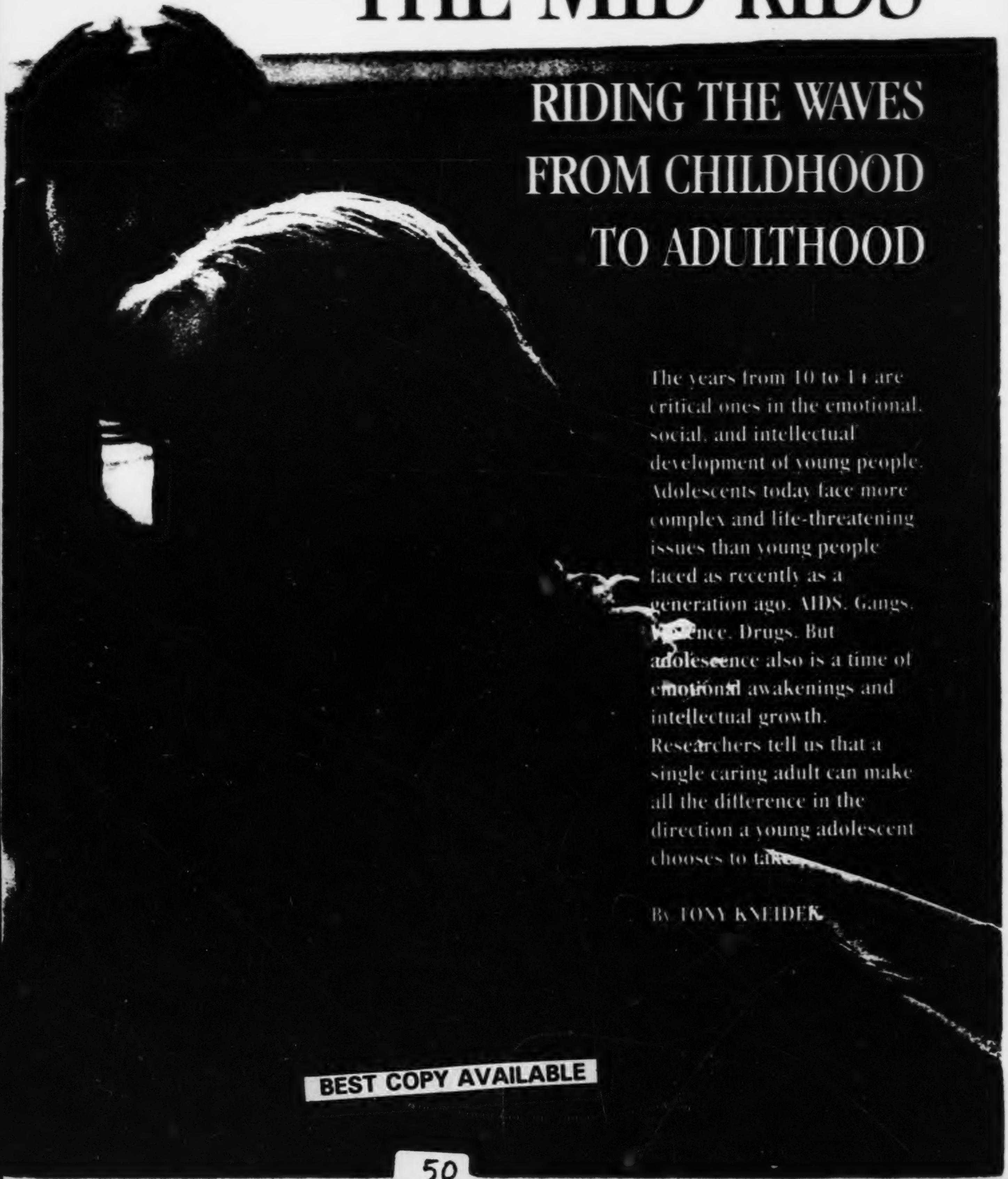
In this issue of *Northwest Education*, we look at the advances and issues involved in educating the children in the middle. We visit a blue ribbon middle school in Montana and a suburban middle school in Idaho. We talk with teachers and students at an inner-city middle school in Portland, and we tag along with middle school kids who are involved in a habitat restoration project in Washington. We look into health and safety, interdisciplinary teams, integrated curriculum, and other issues relevant to the middle years. We also tap into the Internet to see what middle school educators are saying about block scheduling, an issue that is sparking controversy in middle schools across the country.

Throughout, we sprinkle the thoughts, opinions, and feelings of middle school students. Their voices and views provide compelling evidence that kids in the middle need all the support, encouragement, and mentoring that we can provide.

We hope you find this issue of *Northwest Education* informative, useful, and enlightening. As always, we welcome your feedback and urge you to write us at *Northwest Education*, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, Oregon 97204. You can also e-mail your letters to kneidekt@nwrel.org or caudelll@nwrel.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

THE MID KIDS

RIDING THE WAVES FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADULTHOOD



The years from 10 to 14 are critical ones in the emotional, social, and intellectual development of young people. Adolescents today face more complex and life-threatening issues than young people faced as recently as a generation ago. AIDS. Gangs. Violence. Drugs. But adolescence also is a time of emotional awakenings and intellectual growth. Researchers tell us that a single caring adult can make all the difference in the direction a young adolescent chooses to take.

By TONY KNEIDEK

Early adolescence. The middle years. The wonder years. It's a time of heightened self-awareness, sexual stirrings, peer bonding, risk taking, and increased independence. It's a dynamic time when young people ride the waves from childhood to adulthood—a time when parents frequently push children away in the mistaken belief that what kids really need and want is to be left alone.

Researchers tell us that middle schoolers need the direction, love, and guidance that they received from caring adults as grade-schoolers. Their fears need to be addressed, their hopes nurtured, and their voices respected.

"Barely out of childhood, young people ages 10 to 14 are today experiencing more freedom, autonomy, and choice than ever at a time when they still need special nurturing, protection, and guidance," write the authors of *Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century*. "Without the sustained involvement of parents and other adults in safeguarding their welfare, young adolescents are at risk of harming themselves and others."

Teacher Talk, a publication from the Center for Adolescent Studies at Indiana University, notes that adolescents need a balance of five key supports, including:

1. **Belonging:** a feeling of love, trust, and attachment to others or institutions
2. **Mastery:** the potential to achieve in a variety of ways
3. **Independence:** learning the difference between being a strong leader and an aggressor
4. **Generosity:** using opportunities to help others
5. **Stimulation:** a variety of interesting, fun, and engaging activities

Increasingly, children between 10 and 15 are involved in unhealthy risk taking that can lead to a lifetime of grief. Many of these kids come from neighborhoods steeped in violence and homes infected by poverty, abuse, drug addiction, or indifference. Toss in reduced funding for education, higher teacher-student ratios, and reductions in counseling and other programs and it becomes clear that middle school reformers have some formidable obstacles in their paths.

Pete Lorain, President-elect of the National Middle School Association (NMSA), says that funding reductions are shortsighted and counterproductive to efforts to restructure middle schools. "We know what makes schools work, but it flies in the face of what is happening in education," says Lorain, a former middle school principal who currently is Director of Personnel in Oregon's Tigard-Tualatin School District. "Funding is the key issue. The shift is going the wrong way. It's suicidal."

RICK STIER

In *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Schools*, the NMSA identifies six characteristics of middle schools and describes several educational practices that reflect student and societal needs. The characteristics are not a boilerplate for middle school reform. "*This We Believe* represents a process, a belief system, a way of thinking," Lorain says. "Educators need to understand that school improvement is not an event. There's an ebb and a flow to improvement that occurs as communities change and as kids change."

Developmentally responsive middle schools, the NMSA says, are characterized by:

- **Educators committed to young adolescents.** Middle-level educators need specific preparation and ongoing professional development as they pursue their careers. State departments and higher education must play active roles in providing continuous professional development, and school districts must take advantage of the opportunities to secure, motivate, and sustain middle-level teachers.
- **A shared vision.** This vision becomes the catalyst for a written mission statement supported by students, teachers, administrators, families, and others in the community. It should be developed collaboratively and reviewed and renewed periodically.

> *"Young adolescents are curious and concerned about themselves and their world rather than being rebellious and argumentative as they are often portrayed in the media. They want to contribute and need adults who believe in them and who can provide appropriate challenge, opportunity, and support."*
>
> —This We Believe, *NMSA*

- **High expectations for all.** Teachers, administrators, and others must hold high expectations for middle-level students and themselves.
- **An adult advocate for every student.** Each student will have one adult who knows and cares for him or her and who supports that student's academic and personal development. "The ideal school," the NMSA notes, "demonstrates a continuity of caring that extends over the student's entire middle-level experience so that no student is neglected."
- **Family and community partnerships.** Schools must take the initiative in providing varied and meaningful opportunities for parent and community involvement. They also can assist families in creating and sustaining positive home learning environments.
- **A positive school climate.** A safe learning environment is inviting and caring. It also promotes a sense of community and encourages learning.

The NMSA also says that developmentally responsive middle-level schools provide: curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory; varied teaching and learning approaches; assessment and evaluation that promote learning; flexible organizational structures; programs and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety; and comprehensive guidance and support services.

"Successful middle-level schools are grounded in the understanding that young adolescents are capable of far more than adults often assume," the NMSA says. "Young adolescents are curious and concerned about themselves and their world rather than being rebellious and argumentative as they are often portrayed in the media. They want to contribute and need adults who believe in them and who can provide appropriate challenge, opportunity, and support."

Dropping Out: A Growing Problem

In "Dropping Out of Middle School: A Multilevel Analysis of Students and Schools," Russell Rumberger focuses on young adolescents who choose to leave school. Rumberger, Professor of Education at the University of California at Santa Barbara, uses data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS) of 1988 to examine the middle school dropout issue from individual and institutional perspectives. His article appears in the fall 1995 *American Educational Research Journal*.

At the individual level, Rumberger found that several family- and school-experience factors emerge that influence the decision to drop out of school. Both the structure of the family and the way parents interact with their children and schools influence the dropout rate, Rumberger notes, and poverty remains a "powerful predictor of dropping out." Rumberger also identifies several family structures that increase the likelihood of dropping out. "Students from single-parent families, stepfamilies, and non-English-speaking families had significantly higher odds of dropping out of school than other students."

Among the family process variables, Rumberger found that parental involvement in school organizations or other volunteer efforts provide a strong framework for student success. "Students of actively involved parents were much less likely to drop out than other students," he writes. "Students who reported less parental supervision had 34 percent higher odds of dropping out than other students." Both results, Rumberger notes, support a growing body of research that identifies parental involvement as a strong indicator of student success.

Rumberger also found that students whose parents had low educational expectations (only graduating from high school) were more than five times as likely to drop out of school.

Among the academic background factors, grade retention was the single most powerful predictor of whether a student would drop out. "Students who were held back in school were more than 11 times as likely to drop out of school than students who were not held back," Rumberger found. Changing schools also significantly increased the odds of dropping out. "Each time a student changed schools, the odds of dropping out increased by 30 percent," Rumberger says.

Student attitudes, behaviors, and academic performance in eighth grade also are gauges of whether a student will drop out of school. Students with a high self-concept and a strong sense of control were more likely to stay in school. Conversely, students who felt they were viewed as troublemakers or poor students were 50 percent more likely to drop out than other students. Students with low educational expectations—only graduating from high school—were seven times more likely to drop out than students with high educational goals.

Students who were absent 15 percent of the time and more were far more likely to drop out, Rumberger notes. Other behavioral indicators of dropping out include non-participation in extracurricular activities both in school and in the community.

Grades and standardized test scores also influence students' decisions to leave school early. A one-point increase in grade-point average reduces the predicted dropout rate by 70 percent, Rumberger found.

Demographic factors also play a role in school success, with African American, Hispanic American, and Native American eighth-grade students all at a significantly higher risk of dropping out than European American or Asian American students.

"Overall," Rumberger writes, "the results reveal that a wide variety of demographic, family, and educational factors predict the odds of eighth-grade students' dropping out of school. These results are consistent with the many empirical studies done on dropouts, most of which have focused on high school rather than middle school students. The results confirm that many of the factors that predict dropping out of high school also predict dropping out of middle school."

Rumberger says schools should review policies on grade retention, school transfer, and discipline that penalize students for certain behaviors but have detrimental effects on academic performance. "These policies," he notes, "have more to do with behavior issues than academic learning and, as such, are often ignored in the school reform debate. Yet they may be critically important if schools want to become committed to improving the education of all students."

The Road from Risk to Resiliency

In rural Moses Lake, Washington, a youth walks into a middle school classroom and opens fire, killing a teacher and two classmates with weapons he concealed under his coat. In Portland, Oregon, a boy slits his best friend's throat, then kills the boy's sister and mother before ending his own life. In Butte, Montana, a 10-year-old boy shoots and kills a classmate on the school playground.

RICK STIER

As a society, we try to make sense of the brutalities that erupt in our homes, communities, and classrooms. But it is important to remember that the incidences of violence committed by youth are isolated and infrequent. This observation is not meant to diminish the grief of those violated, but to provide a perspective that defies the increasingly common perception of schools as armed camps.

"When there's one gun in a high school, the average citizen starts to believe there's one in every school," a San Diego teacher said in the Public Agenda Foundation report, *Given the Circumstances: Teachers Talk About Public Education Today*. "The same with drug busts. They believe what they see on TV."

Of course, the situation for American youth has worsened in recent decades. Consider, for example, that 12- to 15-year-old children are the most likely age group to be victimized by violent crime. One of eight young people in that age group become victims of violent crime, according to a Bureau of Justice Statistics Report cited in the January 1996 *Middle School Journal*. This is more than double the rate for 25- to 34-year-olds and seven times that of 50- to 64-year-olds.

Crimes committed by youth also are on the rise. Gay bashing, race-related hate crimes, religious intolerance, and sexual harassment all are being perpetrated by young people at increasing rates. Self-destructive behaviors—suicide and suicide attempts, sexual intercourse, and drug abuse—are prevalent among young adolescents in rural, urban, and suburban communities.

The Public Agenda Foundation reports that teachers and the public agree that persistent troublemakers should be removed from class, that students should be kept on campus during the school day, that drugs—including tobacco products—should be banned on school grounds, and that kids caught with weapons or drugs should be expelled.

"The emphasis on order is one area where the top concerns of teachers overlap with those of the public," the foundation notes. "Fully 81 percent of teachers say that the worst behaved students get the most attention in school. In focus groups, teachers regularly talked about the one or two unruly children who are so disruptive that they siphon off the teacher's time and keep other students from learning."

The picture for young adolescents is not entirely bleak. Increasingly, researchers are exploring protective factors, those attributes that increase a young person's potential for growing into a healthy, productive, contributing adult. "An important approach to improving the school success rate of students who experience many of the risk factors which can lead to failure, is to examine the notion of resilience," note the authors of "Defying the Odds: Middle Schoolers in High Risk Circumstances Who Succeed."

"Despite incredible hardships and the presence of several of these risk factors, there are some students who benefit from what is known as protective factors," the authors write in the September 1995 *Middle School Journal*. "These students can be termed resilient. They have defied the odds for failure."

A resiliency approach differs from the risk-focused approach in some fundamental ways. Researcher Bonnie Benard characterizes the resilient child as one who is socially competent, with problem-solving skills, and a sense of autonomy, purpose, and future. Benard's synthesis of three decades of research identifies three key facets of families, schools, and communities that produce resiliency in children:

1. The presence of at least one caring, supportive adult in the child's life
2. The communication of consistently clear and high expectations to the child
3. The provision of ample opportunities for the child to participate and contribute in meaningful ways

The shift from a risk to a resiliency model of addressing student behaviors involves fundamental shifts in thinking and acting. Linda Winfield, principal research scientist at the Center for Research on Schooling for Disadvantaged Students at the Johns Hopkins University, writes that education policymakers must address new questions if they are to shift their focus from risk factors to protective factors.

"In order to move beyond simply identifying and categorizing youth as at risk," she writes in ***Resilience, Schooling, and Development in African American Youth***, "the focus must necessarily shift to understanding the notion of resilience. Viewed in this manner, the critical issues in education are not who is at risk or how many of the factors one has to have to be at risk. Rather, the critical issue of policy and instruction centers around identifying the protective processes and mechanisms that reduce risk and foster resilience."

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development urges communities to adapt five recommendations that "provide life chances for adolescents." They are:

1. Re-engage families with their adolescent children

2. Create developmentally appropriate schools for adolescents

3. Develop health-promotion strategies for young adolescents

4. Strengthen communities with young adolescents

5. Promote the constructive potential of the media

From Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century

Researchers have identified four protective factors that develop resilience:

- The reduction of negative outcomes by altering either the risk or the child's exposure to the risk
- The reduction of a negative chain reaction following risk exposure
- The establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy
- The opening of opportunities during critical periods in children's lives

In her research synthesis, ***Fostering Resiliency in Kids: Protective Factors in the Family, School, and Community***, Benard notes that a higher percentage of high-risk children develop various problems than the general population. However, a "greater percentage of the children become healthy, competent adults," she writes.

For example, research shows that 75 percent of children of alcoholic parents do not develop alcohol problems, and 50 percent of children rise out of the disadvantaged conditions in which they were raised. "The challenge for the 1990s," Benard writes, "is the implementation of prevention strategies that strengthen protective factors in our families, schools, and communities."

What Kids Need to Thrive

In recent months, both the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development and the NMSA have published major new reports on the needs of young adolescents and the schools that serve them. Children between the ages of 10 and 14 are experiencing profound emotional, intellectual, physical, social, and moral growth, note the authors of the NMSA's *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Schools*. "It is important to remember that these areas of development are inexorably intertwined," the report notes. "With young adolescents, the achievement of academic success, for example, is highly dependent upon their other developmental needs being met."

In *Great Transitions*, the Carnegie Council urges communities to adopt five recommendations that "provide life chances for adolescents." They are:

1. Re-engage families with their adolescent children. Parents, the council notes, often disengage from their children once they are out of elementary school. Instead, they should remain active in their children's education, and schools should welcome families and cultivate their support.
2. Create developmentally appropriate schools for adolescents. Middle and junior high schools should promote health and learning in safe, small-scale environments. They should be intellectually stimulating, employ cooperative learning strategies, and not employ tracking strategies.
3. Develop health-promotion strategies for young adolescents. The health risks for young people have changed dramatically in recent years. Health professionals must learn new ways to connect with families, schools, and community organizations. To meet the growing health needs of young people, Carnegie recommends expanded health insurance coverage for adolescents, increased school-based and school-related health clinics for adolescents, and training for health providers that meets the developmental needs and behavior-related problems of adolescents in sensitive and caring ways.
4. Strengthen communities with young adolescents. Expand the services of national and local youth organizations to meet the needs of young adolescents before and after school. Communities must provide safe, attractive, and stimulating settings for youth during the times when parents are not available to supervise their children.
5. Promote the constructive potential of the media. Adolescents are bombarded daily with media messages that promote the use of violence to resolve conflicts, that glamorize the use of drugs, and promote irresponsible sexual activity. "The undeniable power of the media could be used far more constructively in the lives of young adolescents," Carnegie notes. "Families, schools, and other pivotal institutions can help young people become more media literate so they can examine media messages more critically."

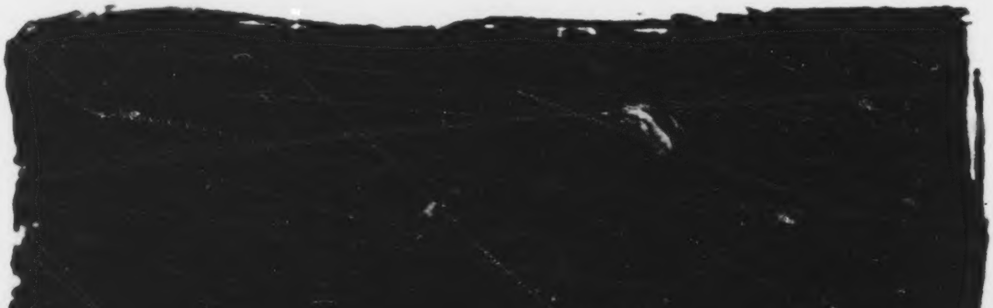
The council also urges businesses, government, universities, professional organizations, and others to help meet the needs of young people. Any efforts, the council notes, must be nonpartisan, sustained, and based on facts and research. "Above all," the council says, "a long-term view is essential to bring about the difficult, indeed fundamental, changes necessary in modern society to improve the life chances of all our children." ■

LIFE STUDIES

Learning Beyond the Chain-link Fence

Students at Portland's George Middle School discover valuable lessons in their classrooms, their community, and their own backyard

By LEE SHERMAN CAUDELL



There are few life-forms in North Portland that George Middle School kids haven't touched, tested, planted, tagged, tended, and observed.

For these urban middle schoolers, life studies start in the classroom with a collection of caged creatures that students feed and befriend. They extend to the schoolyard, where student-designed gardens showcase Northwest plants that beckon migrating birds. They reach into the neighborhood, to the rivers and lakes that George kids help to clean up. And next year, they're going global. Through an international computer link, George kids will trade data on bird migrations with students in Guadalajara, Mexico.

Wrapping curriculum in nature and neighborhood enhances learning for the complex life-form known as the middle school student, says longtime educator Jane Arkes. As principal of George Middle School, Arkes oversees the most economically disadvantaged middle school population in the Portland Public Schools.

"In some respects, kids this age are a lot like kindergartners with long legs," says Arkes. "They aren't ready to do a lot of abstract kinds of thinking and activities. They have to touch and feel things. They have to be actively involved."

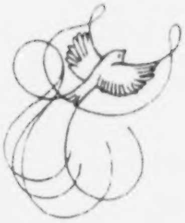
That active involvement might mean caring for the squawking, cooing, slithering, snuffling creatures that inhabit George's animal lab. Every morning at 7:45, the student caretakers are hard at work cleaning cages and filling food trays for a hamster named Murphy, a boa constrictor named Big Ben, a pair of cockatiels named Holly and Polly, and other miscellaneous reptiles, birds, and mammals.

One recent morning after showing a visitor the proper way to serve birdseed and vitamins to a dove named Ringo, sixth-grader Andrew Hayes raised his hand toward classmate Shannon Ginocchio. "High five!" he says. They slap their palms together. "We do that when we accomplish stuff," Andrew says. "We love our job that we do."

Like many learning opportunities at George, the animal lab goes beyond the chain-link fence that separates the school from the traffic roaring down Columbia Boulevard, the major thoroughfare for trucks carrying goods to and from the Port of Portland. As participants in George's applied learning program—one of two alternative-education programs within the school—students like Andrew and Shannon transport their noisy menagerie to elementary schools in this industrial neighborhood. There, they share with younger children what they've learned about each animal's behavior and habitat. Some of the other applied-learning projects that have reached deeply into the community are:

Naturescaping project— George joined the National Wildlife Federation and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in a statewide effort to increase habitat for migrating birds by planting native vegetation in empty or landscaped lots. With the help of AmeriCorps volunteers, the middle schoolers worked with the district architect, school custodian, natural gas personnel, and various agencies to design and install a garden and stream in the school's courtyard. Students make public appearances to share their expertise in natural landscaping.

Columbia Slough project— When state and local officials commissioned a study of pollution in the Columbia Slough, which runs through North Portland, George students helped scientists gather and test samples of water and fish.



The students also conducted a neighborhood survey to find out who fished in the slough, what kinds of fish they caught, and how many fish they ate.

Smith and Bybee lakes project—When Metro, the regional government for the Portland area, began developing a pair of neglected urban lakes for public recreation, George students took monthly counts of waterfowl and made an inventory of species—information they entered into Metro's database. The students also helped publicize the new parks. Working with Metro and the National Wildlife Federation, they created a mural depicting lake wildlife and canvas banners announcing "Nature in Your Neighborhood." The signs were posted in local businesses.

Sauvie Island project—As part of the five-year Urban Ecosystems Project of Portland State University, George's bilingual students next year will work with college students to band migrating birds at a wildlife refuge on Sauvie Island in North Portland. Other students will raise native plants in a greenhouse. The students will share information in Spanish with Mexican students over the Internet. The project, supported by a $1.8 million U.S. Department of Education grant to the university, aims to improve math and science curriculum and integrate it with social studies at George and two other North Portland middle schools.

Ramsey Lake project—Along with students from two other Portland schools, seventh-graders from George recently helped plant 1,500 seedlings—red alder, Oregon ash, black cottonwood, Sitka willow, and other species—at nearby Ramsey Lake. The planting is designed to create wetlands that will filter pollutants out of storm runoff and, ultimately, keep them out of the Columbia Slough. The city's Bureau of Environmental Services led the student planting as part of the university's Urban Ecosystems Project.

PARTNERSHIPS PRESENT OPPORTUNITIES

George's applied learning wasn't always so tightly connected to local issues and initiatives, admits Ginny Rosenberg, the teacher who coordinates the program.

When it began eight years ago, the program focused on using field trips to show kids how their classroom studies applied to real-world problems and solutions. But on field trips, Rosenberg notes, students are observers instead of doers.

Rosenberg joined forces with agencies such as the National Wildlife Federation, Metro, and the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Through these partnerships, Rosenberg has discovered ways to involve students more fully, both in learning and in life. "It was one of those minor shifts that changes your whole perspective," she says. "It just opened everything up. I began trying to get the students involved in real issues. Now they can see that their mission is to become functioning members of society."

Keeping projects and students on target is a challenge. "It's like leading a 10-ring circus, making sure every act knows what they need to do," Rosenberg says. "The goal is to let the kids take charge. Then, if the tiger suddenly moves left instead of right, the kids will know how to handle it."

PROVIDING A SENSE OF FAMILY

The shift from field trips to field studies is just one change that has provided George students with a more engaging and meaningful education. Another happened four years ago when Principal Arkes divided the 580-student school into two smaller schools, called "houses."

"We have a real at-risk population," says Arkes. "Many of them don't have real stable home situations. We were struggling to help give a better sense of family. I felt that to really change the culture of the school, to give students a sense of security, to have adults that they trusted, we needed to build a sense of community."

Within each house, interdisciplinary teams of three or four teachers work with the same 90 students all year. Team teaching and student grouping open the door to integrated curriculum and flexible units that don't fit neatly into 40-minute blocks, Arkes notes.

Next year, sixth- through eighth-grade students will be grouped together and will stay together throughout middle school. To help teachers prepare for the multiage classrooms, Arkes has built in extra time for preparation and—with Portland Public Schools facing deep cuts in funding—has found local and federal grant money to pay for it.

George not only blends ages in its classrooms, it also blends all kinds of kids. Students with special needs—disadvantaged kids and those with mental, emotional, or physical disabilities—are mainstreamed. And teachers often pair students in applied learning with kids in the regular program for projects.

SCHOOL HEALTH CLINIC

LOOKING BEYOND THE TUMMY ACHE

Last year, a George Middle School student died from inhaling butane. In another incident, four boys burned their legs with a fungicidal spray, hoping to scar their bodies to deepen their bond of friendship. And a play called *Secrets*, based on true stories of young AIDS victims, raised many questions from students during a Q&A session.

Drug use, self-mutilation, unprotected sex: These are among the grim but critical issues dealt with at George's health center, one of the first two school-based clinics in Portland middle schools. After the butane death, the school's crisis team worked one-on-one with students who were troubled by the tragedy. The boys who turned up at the clinic with ulcerated legs received counseling in identifying healthier ways to bond. After the Kaiser-sponsored AIDS play, students swarmed the clinic asking for HIV screenings.

"Kids have to know the risks that are out there," says Principal Jane Arkes. "These are not little-kid things. These are life-and-death issues."

Based on its 10-year experience operating clinics in Portland high schools, the Multnomah County Health Department knew that the risky behaviors that threaten high schoolers' health typically begin in middle school, says community health nurse Lori Koch. Last year, the county set up the city's first middle school clinics at George and Portsmouth middle schools. The schools are located in the St. John's neighborhood, an economically and culturally diverse area in North Portland where health-care services are scarce.

"One-third of the population here in St. Johns has not graduated high school," says Koch, who works full time coordinating services at the clinic. The neighborhood has the city's highest percentage of people over age 25 without a high school diploma, according to data from Portland Public Schools and Metro. "You have a very high population of parents who are undereducated, underemployed, and, therefore, underinsured."

Sniffles and sore throats, headaches and lice, immunizations and sports physicals are the routine reasons kids come to the clinic. But when a student shows up again and again, clinic staff look behind the ailment of the day.

"After you've seen a tummy ache two or three times or a headache two or three times, you know something else is going on," says Koch. "We're able to talk to them and route them into some form of help."

Denise Chuckovich, who manages school-based health centers in Multnomah County, says: "What's really happening is that students are checking the place out—Is this a safe place?"

Alcoholism and sexual abuse—problems that often crop up in struggling families—are common in St. Johns, according to Koch. Kids in alcoholic or abusive homes frequently visit the clinic with minor complaints.

"We see them for the sore throat, the earache, the sprained ankle, the period cramps," says Koch, who works with a full-time mental health consultant, a half-time pediatric nurse practitioner, and a senior office assistant. "They usually present with fairly small things. By the third visit, we do a risk assessment, where we look at everything." The thorough checkup provides a full picture of the person, including where they live, what their lifestyle is like, substance use, sexual history, medical history, and psychosocial history. "We identify risks and then work on a care plan around those risky behaviors," Koch says.

A care plan can include individual, group, and family counseling, as well as referral to outside agencies. A key clinic goal, Koch says, is keeping kids in class. For example, a child with an upset stomach may be reacting to a stressful situation at home. Before the clinic was established, the student would report to the office; if the school nurse wasn't in, the student often was sent home. Now, Koch says, clinic staff can diagnose and treat the illness and its underlying causes, while keeping the child in school and then returning her to class.

Kids can't get condoms or birth control at the clinic. But they *can* get information, counseling, and exams for family planning and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

"Eighty-five percent of the family planning counseling I do is on abstinence," says Koch. "Our focus is not talking about birth control. It's talking about choices. It's talking about what you want to do with your life, what your goals are, and how early sexual involvement changes that."

If students want birth control or condoms, they are directed to county clinics outside the school. By law, kids don't need parents' permission to get family-planning counseling, birth-control devices, or treatment for STDs. Clinic staff strongly encourage students to involve their parents. But kids often are reluctant or unable to discuss the subject at home. Parents, too, sometimes shy away from the topic, Koch points out.

"The beauty of it is that many of the kids who have not been able to talk to their parents about sexual issues have a safe place to come and get information," Koch says.

Except for family-planning and STD services, students need parental permission to access medical or mental health services at the clinic. About 80 percent of George students have permission to use the clinic—a percentage that Koch expects to increase when non-English speaking parents begin receiving permission forms in their own language. The county, Koch says, is working on translations.

The angry objections some Portlanders raised when the first school-based clinics opened in Portland in 1985 have given way to strong community and parental support, says Chuckovich. "Once we get in and start delivering services, people see what a valuable resource it is," she notes.

In a typical month, about 250 students—half the student body—visit the clinic. Many go in more than once. Services and prescriptions are free, although Medicaid and families' insurance companies sometimes are billed, says Koch.

Sexuality issues are only one small piece of the clinic's work. Less than 10 percent of the services provided at George relate to family planning, Chuckovich says. "We really want to look at the whole picture of what's going on with that person and respect them as a person," she stresses. "They feel very comfortable here."

—Lee Sherman Caudell

Kids with serious behavioral problems are served in another alternative education program within the school. "This is the category of students who have trouble accepting authority, following the general kinds of rules you need in any community of people living and working together," Arkes says. "They're resistant to conforming. They try people's patience because they push and test all the time, and they tend not to be academically motivated."

Without help with basic social skills, many of these kids are headed for expulsion. Although they are blended into the regular program, they move in and out of that program depending on their conduct. Three times a day, they check in with their teacher, who guides them through crises and pinpoints problem areas. If the students are disruptive, they're moved to a separate classroom until the episode passes.

George is also the ESL center for the North Portland cluster, and enrolls almost 200 language-minority students. Those students—mainly Hispanic, Southeast Asian, and Russian—are mainstreamed when their English skills allow them to keep up academically. The ESL teachers and aides monitor the classrooms to check students' progress. Sometimes, they teach alongside regular staff. Next year, one student grouping will blend native English speakers with native Spanish speakers for bilingual instruction.

GIVING TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ROOM

Arkes is quick to credit teachers for initiating and carrying out many of George's innovations. Sometimes, she plants the ideas and watches to see if they take root. If they don't root, she says, they probably weren't very good ideas to begin with. Other times, she nurtures teachers' ideas and encourages them to take the steps necessary to make them real.

It is Arkes' willingness to take risks and give staff lots of latitude that has given George room to grow, according to Rosenberg. "How many principals," she asks, "would let you dig up the cement in the courtyard and drag wheelbarrows and mud through the building? And she's a tidy person. Most principals would say, 'Good idea, but it's impossible.' She says, 'Let's find a way.'"

The students, too, need room to stretch, says Arkes, who serves as president of the Oregon Middle Level Association. "They're learning how to be adults," she says. "To do that, they have to explore and experiment, and they make mistakes. You have to maintain an atmosphere that helps them understand what they've done wrong, but you haven't destroyed them as a person."

George students have ample opportunities to lead and initiate. For example:

- Shannon developed a passion for dahlias after she visited a dahlia farm. "It was something I was really excited about," she says. "I thought it was something I could make a project about." Shannon researched the fine points of growing dahlias, even phoning a bulb company for information. Rosenberg found a spot for Shannon's dahlias beside Arkes' office. In May, the bulbs went in. Says Rosenberg: "Kids have these great interests and ideas, and people say, 'Oh.' The answer isn't 'Oh,' it's 'Yes, and what else?'"
- When student George Cha was invited to talk about the slough project at an educators' conference two years ago, Rosenberg arranged for him to get a stipend for his presentation.
- When visitors want a tour of George's naturescape, eighth-

grader Josh Fortier, official spokesperson for the garden, is tagged as guide. He points out native plants such as lupine and Ponderosa pine, and explains that they attract orange-crowned warblers and black-headed grosbeaks. He describes how the students worked in groups to study soil and pH, native plants, and neotropical birds. He tells how they mapped the courtyard and wrote letters to solicit funds. He points out the circulating stream and the student-built birdhouses. And, he says, he personally watered the garden two or three times a week over the summer.

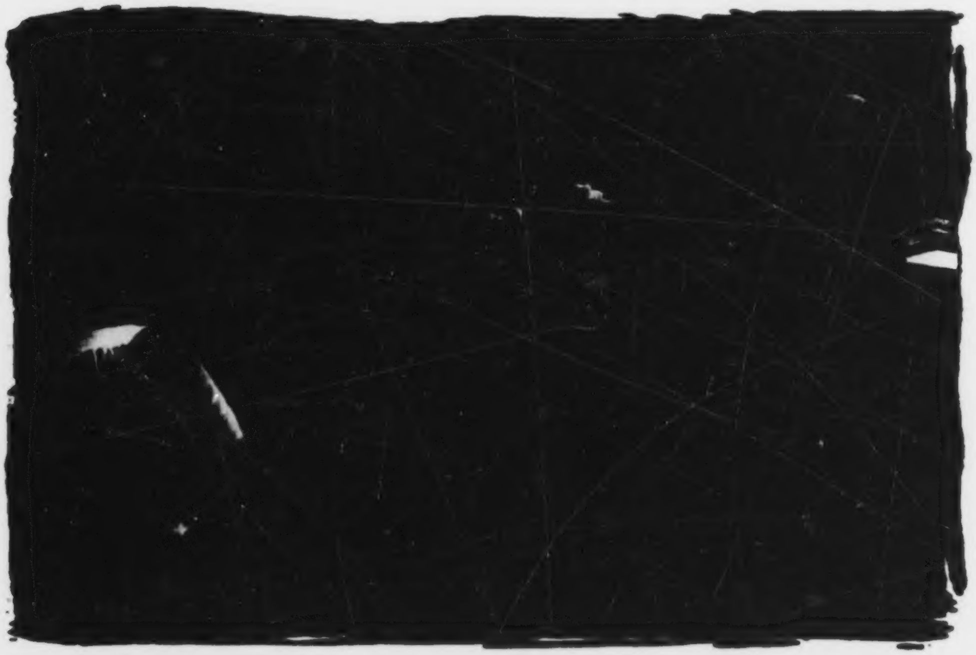
- When a community member at a student presentation suggested that the pump circulating the stream water was wasting energy, Rosenberg kept quiet. After mulling it over, the students decided to look into converting the pump to solar power.
- When several seventh-graders were assigned to map and tend a new triangular garden behind the school one drizzly April morning, teacher Eric Bennett popped his head out a couple of times to check on progress. The students, rain dripping on their compasses and notebooks, were absorbed in their work, conferring on angles and spreading compost.

"This is a really hard age group," Arkes says. "Their educational needs really do get overlooked. They have all these explosions going on inside them. You can see the variation in size, from little tiny petite things to kids who are tall and well developed. And their maturity levels go that full span."

To the full-throttle flux of early adolescence add poverty and family discord, and you get an educational challenge something like shooting rapids in a canoe. Only the most skilled teachers keep the boat upright, says Arkes.

"You have to be good to work in this kind of school," she says. "You have to have a certain kind of commitment to be effective and not burn out. You have to be able to deal with some fairly heavy issues with students without getting yourself emotionally involved. There's a real fine balance there, instructionally."

Photos for this story by Rick Stier, Lone Pine Photography, Portland, Oregon. ■



Mixing It Up in Montana

Hellgate Middle School Provides High Technology, Practical Skills, and Hands-on Learning

Story and photos by TONY KNEIDEK

Shelby Larsen brushes a loose strand of hair from her forehand with the back of her hand. The sixth-grader is on the verge of breaking a sweat as she pulls linoleum from the floor of a four- by six-foot cubicle in the practical technology laboratory at Hellgate Middle School near Missoula, Montana.

Larsen is part of a three-student team that is deep into the construction of a bathroom. That's right: Larsen and all other sixth-graders at Hellgate build a bathroom from scratch. That includes the framing, sheetrocking (even the dreaded mudding and taping), painting, wiring, plumbing, and installing fixtures, floor covering, and other accessories. The students mix their own paint, use building tools like old pros, troubleshoot problems, and have a good time learning along the way.

"You get to learn a lot about plumbing and how to paint and texture walls," Larsen says. "It's funner than reading about it in a book. I like to do things and not just read about them."

Do things. Do things. Do things. It might as well be the mantra among students and teachers at Hellgate. "These kids need a lot of understanding about where they are emotionally and intellectually," says Sally Tibbs, an eighth-grade science teacher. "They need to learn basic skills, but there needs to be connections between what they see in the classroom and what goes on in the real world. It's best when these students can apply what they learn, when things are not so abstract. For these kids, that's really important."

The practical tech lab houses nine of the bathroom shells, each mounted on wheels so they can be rolled to a sewer pipe to give the plumbing a true test. Students work diligently and cooperatively at each of the cubicles. The kids are enjoying themselves, and they are aware of what they are learning.

"Teamwork," says Nathan Velin as he, Danny Blakesley, and Ben VandeVen install fixtures in their bathroom. "We're learning how to share information, how to share credit, and not be selfish."

Blakesley says the students also must learn to work independently. "We're having to help ourselves and learn how to solve problems." Adds VandeVen: "This is just fun—everything about it. We're learning how to take care of a house."

The projects also require math skills, art, and science, including lessons on the type of wood used in the bathroom construction, where it grows, and the value of recycling materials. "I like learning new things each day," says Jessica Dutton. "If I ever own a house and it has a plumbing or electrical problem, I want to know how to fix it so I don't have to pay a lot of money. I could also earn money doing this kind of work."

So what's the story here? Is Hellgate, a rural school that

nudges the Missoula city limits, merely teaching kids outdated skills in newfangled ways? Pounding nails and drilling holes are not exactly the skills of the 21st century. But critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and decision-making skills are all high on the list of lessons to be learned.

"The more you can give them that's real, the better they're going to learn," says Principal Terry Vanderpan. "These are things they'll be exposed to the rest of their lives."

Hellgate, one of a handful of U.S. Department of Education-designated Blue Ribbon Schools, is providing students a well-rounded education, steeped in the hands-on learning so strongly advocated by middle school reformers. Hellgate also provides cutting-edge technological opportunities to the more than 550 sixth- through eighth-grade students who attend the school that sits on the rim of the Hellgate Canyon.

"This is a pretty high-tech school," notes Vanderpan. "By the time these kids arrive here, they're computer literate." Across the parking lot from Hellgate Middle School, the district elementary school gets students on the early road to technology. The two schools are plunked down in the middle of high-plains range and agricultural land cradled by the Lolo and Bitterroot mountains. Each of the elementary classrooms has at least five computers and

teachers trained in their use.

The middle school includes two computer labs, each with 30 computers. Vanderpan hopes to build the inventory by placing additional computers in classrooms. "There would be less disruption and less time lost going to and from the labs," he says.

Each of the Hellgate School District's 120 computers is networked with links to the world through the Internet. "Our kids are using Windows 95 and all the tricks that come with it," Vanderpan says. Teachers have had ongoing inservice in computer use, and a district partnership with a local bank provides them low-interest loans to purchase computer systems for home use. Chris Deister, a district teacher and local area network (LAN) manager, helps teachers set up and test their systems before taking them home. "We want to make sure that everyone knows how to work with the computers," he says.

Students also take their computer skills outside the school, where they have built home pages for several local nonprofit organizations and the University of Montana. "The technology is really a gateway," says Fred Arnold, a seventh-grade language arts teacher. "The theme in the seventh grade is to develop self-educators. The technology represents another lens on learning, another way of developing self-educators."

Turning Points: Serving Students Well

Turning Points, Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century, by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, examines the condition of America's young adolescents and how well middle grade schools, health institutions, and community organizations serve them.

In the Spring 1993 Carnegie Quarterly newsletter, the council writes:

"Approximately 28 million youngsters fall into the age group served by middle or junior high schools and high schools, and seven million—one in four—are considered at high risk of failing in school and engaging in such dangerous behavior as alcohol and illegal drug abuse, premature and unprotected sexual activity, and addiction to nicotine. They may become victims or perpetrators of violence. They may not be covered by insurance or have access to health care services. Another seven million may be at moderate risk and therefore are a matter of serious concern as well. Because, as a group, adolescents are vulnerable, they need special attention in school."

Turning Points' recommendations include:

1. Create small communities for learning—the key elements of these communities are schools-within-schools or houses, with students and teachers grouped together as teams
2. Teach a core academic program that results in students who are literate (including in the sciences), and know how to think critically, lead a healthy life, behave ethically, and assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralistic society
3. Ensure success for all students through the elimination of tracking by achievement level
4. Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents
5. Improve academic performance through the fostering of health and fitness of young adolescents
6. Reengage families in the education of young adolescents
7. Connect schools with communities—which together share responsibility for each middle grade student's success—through identifying service learning opportunities in the community

The Carnegie Quarterly notes that early results indicate that schools that implement the Turning Points recommendations provide more supportive environments and rigorous academic conditions for middle school students. "Early results from Corporation-supported research being conducted by Robert Felner, director of the Center for Prevention Research and Development at the University of Illinois, are extremely encouraging," Carnegie writes. "Initial findings show significant improvements in students' reading, mathematics, and language arts achievement, in students' rating of the supportiveness of the school environment, and in teachers' ratings of students' behavioral adjustment."

Technology Individualizes Learning

When a laser beam carrying a radio signal slinked its way down the halls and bounced around the corners of Hellgate Middle School before snaking into Vanderpan's office last year, the principal knew that students were behind the prank. It was, Vanderpan figures, further proof that Hellgate students were getting on top of technology.

"I knew the laser beam could happen," he says, "but the radio signal was something else. I was just sitting here when the music of Twisted Sister or one of those groups rides in on a laser. I couldn't believe it."

In Hellgate's vocational technology lab, students work in teams of two at any of 16 stations, each equipped with a computer, a television, and a VCR. The lab is a required elective for all seventh- and eighth-grade students. They work and learn at eight of the stations—which include robotics, computer-assisted drafting, desktop publishing, audio broadcasting, research and design, graphics and animation, and others—in each of the two years. Students build and test scale bridges; carve wooden cars; build and launch rockets; and use computers for problem solving, calculating, and designing.

In the vocational tech lab, teachers bookmark items they want students to read and learn about on the computer. In addition, students explore the Internet from their workstations and watch educational videos related to their topics.

The exploratories, says teacher Jay Ingalls, keep students excited about learning and give them exposure to a variety of skills. Students work at their own pace, do independent research, and rely on each other for assistance. Pretests provide teachers and students valuable information on areas of strengths and weaknesses. Students also answer five questions a day before taking a final test at the end of their work at each individual station. They then move on to another station, where they pair up with new partners. "This gives students a chance to get to know how they work with others," Ingalls says. "In their research, they're encouraged to cooperate and share information."

The key to the computer-assisted learning at Hellgate is that it allows students to explore and frees teachers to individualize learning. "We can have 30 kids in here, each of them working on something different," Ingalls says. "This is a time for them to find out what they like and what they don't like." The lessons, he adds, are provided in an environment that engages students. "These are the things that get kids excited about learning—when they can do something physical, something tangible," Ingalls says.

Team Teaching, Integrated Curriculum, and Financial Control

Hellgate Middle School first opened in its present building just three years ago, when it also shifted from a traditional junior high school curriculum to a middle school concept. However, the school board, Vanderpan, and teachers began planning for the transition years before. Moving from self-contained, 45-minute junior high classes—each with a different teacher teaching a different discipline—to the integrated curriculum, team-teaching, experiential middle school model would require training and time for teachers to adjust.

> "*We have an enlightened school board, and that has made a big difference. They've promoted the changes here all along and helped pay for them. We also have control over our own materials and resources budget, which is nice.*"
>
> —*Sally Tibbs, science teacher*

For the first two years of the transition, teachers learned about the middle school concept and organized a site-based council, Vanderpan says. Another year was spent planning the new building and implementing the middle school concept. When Hellgate Middle School opened in 1992, the transition was complete. It included interdisciplinary curriculum with thematic units; team teaching; cooperative learning groups; an advisory group; exploratory courses; daily individual and team planning periods; and a "no-cut" activity program for music, sports, and clubs. "We feel that every student needs to wear a Hellgate Hawk uniform," Vanderpan says. "They're going to get cut from a high school team soon enough; now is the time for them to participate."

The timing of the shift in philosophy and the need for more space was fortunate and complimentary, Vanderpan and John Lundt wrote in the November 1995 *Middle School Journal*. "As teachers experienced the frustration of trying to hold large-group activities in rooms designed for classes of 30 students, they were also involved in the process of designing a building that would directly address these very concerns."

An elected nine-member site-based council consisting of Vanderpan, a teacher from each grade level, the school counselor, a resource teacher, a parent, and others oversees operation of the school. Plans are in the works to add a student to the team next year.

Hellgate Middle School switched to a team concept when it opened three years ago. That year, several teachers also traveled to Boston. They joined teachers from 90 schools from across the country for a two-week institute that laid the foundation for team teaching, integrated units, collaborative projects, cross-curriculum focus, and other innovations. Hellgate was in the midst of transforming from a fifth- through eighth-grade junior high school to a sixth- through eighth-grade middle school. It patterned its new approach on *Turning Points, Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. (See related story, page 19.)

Today, the school provides a hybrid of approaches. Sixth-graders spend five 45-minute class periods with one teacher, then go to the practical technology lab for their exploratory. Seventh- and eighth-grade students are members of teams consisting of math, science, social studies, and language arts teachers. Art and music teachers also work occasionally with integrated teams, but

scheduling problems prevent them from being full team members.

Teachers determine curriculum, work on teams, collaborate on projects, and integrate teaching units to provide a cross-curriculum focus. In addition, they control the school's $30,000 discretionary fund. "There was a time when I had control of the finances," Vanderpan says. "Teachers would come to me and document their classroom needs. In my infinite wisdom, I'd look over their purchase orders and ask, 'Do you need this?' I really had no clue."

A teacher committee now reviews requests and decides how to allocate the $30,000. "They spend it so much more wisely than I do, so much more efficiently," Vanderpan says.

Sally Tibbs, the eighth-grade science teacher, says teachers feel respected and supported at Hellgate. "We have an enlightened school board, and that has made a big difference. They've promoted the changes here all along and helped pay for them. We also have control over our own materials and resources budget, which is nice," says Tibbs, a Hellgate teacher since 1981.

Teachers engaged in the management of their school as well as in the day-to-day lives of their students have been instrumental in the restructuring and success at Hellgate, Vanderpan says. "Teachers here have all the control," he notes. "In fact, that's one of the main reasons that this school has been so successful: the teachers have so much say in what they do."

For more information, contact Principal Terry Vanderpan, (406) 721-2452, or visit the Hellgate Middle School home page: http://www.hellgate.k12.mt.us/middle.htm. ■

JOB SHADOW

It's more than just tagging along

In Issaquah, Washington, middle school students get an insider's view of potential careers

Story and photos by Matthew Heagle

ISSAQUAH, Washington—For one day last winter, 14-year-old Aaron Schwid was the youngest worker at Immunex, one of Seattle's premiere biopharmaceutical and therapeutics companies.

Schwid, an eighth-grader at Issaquah Middle School, donned the lab coat and spent the day at the elbow of a molecular biologist who had agreed to show him around and let him help with the work. For an eight-hour day, Schwid applied chemicals to cultures, heated them in ovens, and noted the results of his tests. It was all a part of Job Shadow Day at Issaquah Middle School, a day when each of the 270 eighth-graders got a glimpse at the world of work.

"I like science and I thought it would be interesting to work with genes and stuff," says Schwid, explaining why he chose the biotech profession for his job shadow experience.

Schwid and his classmates were responsible for setting up their job shadows—everything from selecting a profession to contacting someone in the field to making arrangements for the day. Some students arranged to spend the day in occupations where they had a personal interest. Others, though, took what they could get.

What they learned was surprising to them and gratifying to their teachers, who are attempting to instill in middle school children an awareness of opportunities and challenges that await them in a future that's never as far off as they suppose.

"If you want to make an impression and change the way young people think about themselves and about the world, middle school is a great place to do it," says Connie Heldt, an eighth-grade humanities teacher at Issaquah who also coordinates the Job Shadow Day. "They're so open at that period in their lives. They're very altruistic at that age—they want to help, they want to feel important. This makes them feel like adults."

Job Shadow Highlights School-to-Work Activities

Heldt says that at Issaquah Middle School the annual Job Shadow Day is the highlight of a school year punctuated by school-to-work activities. It all begins in the fall, when a motivational speaker talks to students about setting personal and career goals. Trips to the local high school help eighth-grade students keep the next step of their education in mind and give them access to a variety of career resources. An activity called "Pay Me What I'm Worth" teaches the workers of tomorrow some job-market savvy. And at year's end, the Spring Forum provides a venue for students to present a portfolio of projects and demonstrated skills for adult community members, including local luminaries. One year the mayor of Issaquah attended, another year it was the school superintendent. It is at the Spring Forum that Schwid will show the fruit of his Job Shadow Day.

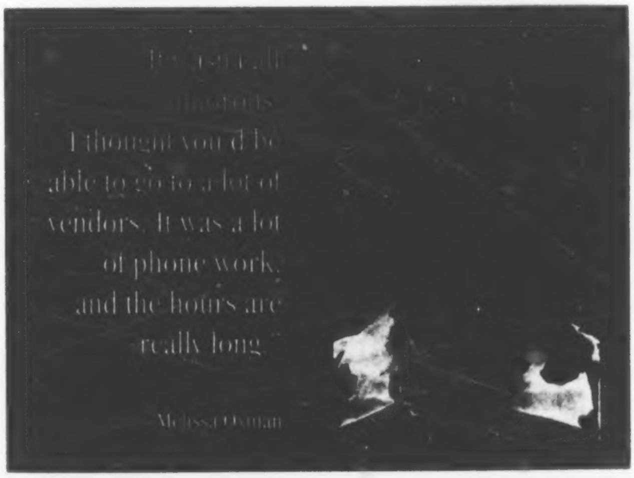
The work at Immunex was not what Schwid expected. "I thought they'd be in this really exotic lab with gene splicers and big computers all over the place," he says. "They were all crammed in this little room, and it smelled really bad because they were growing bacteria. It was kind of boring, too, because you had to wait around a lot."

Another student, 13-year-old Melissa Oxman, shadowed someone whose job was not one she has set her sights on. "I really want to be a fashion designer, but I couldn't find one to shadow so I chose a buyer for Nordstrom [the Seattle-based department store]."

Still, it was an eye-opener for her. "It wasn't all glamorous," Oxman says, recounting how her buyer kept track of what each store should be selling more of based on hour-to-hour comparisons of past years' sales. "I thought you'd be able to go to a lot of vendors. It was a lot of phone work, and the hours are really long."

Fourteen-year-old Whitney Lewis shadowed a line chef at a local restaurant, and spent the day doing food preparation. The experience reinforced her desire to be a chef, but she questions the financial benefits of the work. "I want to be rich, so I have to work my way up there (she indicates with her fingers the culinary ladder). I have to get a cookbook out now. Something like that."

Kevin Mitchell, 14, found that shadowing a Federal Aviation Administration inspector reinforced his desire to go into that line of work. "He got paid really good," Mitchell says. In addition, Mitchell enjoyed talking with captains in the cockpits of 767s and listening to airline representatives discuss safety procedures.



"It wasn't all glamorous. I thought you'd be able to go to a lot of vendors. It was a lot of phone work, and the hours are really long."

Melissa Oxman

Job Shadow Day ended up being more than a day for some students. Marisa Kuplan, 14, went to an evening basketball game between two local high schools with a sportswriter for the *Seattle Times* newspaper. "The next day he showed me how he puts the story together," says Kuplan. Like Lewis and Mitchell, she's even more interested in sportswriting now that she's had a taste of the real thing.

Shadowing Provides Realistic Glimpse

Students agreed that their job shadow experiences were valuable, even if disillusioning for some. "I still want to do something with science," says Schwid, "just more exciting. Maybe be a mad scientist or something; that'd be fun."

"I think it's also good preparation for life," adds Lewis, "because you have to be alone when you do it. I did mine with someone I didn't even know. It's kind of like a job interview."

That's the whole point, Heldt says. "We encourage the students to shadow someone they don't know. Part of the process is being uncomfortable. The adult world is about taking risks, and I've told the kids that. I've found that kids who shadow someone they don't know have a much more positive experience. The red carpet is rolled out for them. People are much more eager to make sure the kids understand what's going on and let them be involved in it."

Students at Issaquah Middle School have participated in the job shadow activity for six years. In that time, says Heldt, students have shadowed lawyers and cartoonists, watched brain surgery, spent time behind bars in jail, and worked all shifts, including graveyard.

However, the most popular choices of students include police work, firefighting, radio and television, veterinary practice, and—perhaps more than any other—dentistry. Heldt laughs and says, "Thank goodness for the dentist industry."

For more information, contact Connie Heldt, humanities teacher, Issaquah Middle School, (206) 557-6831.

Matthew Fleagle is a Seattle-based freelance writer. ■

HOMOPHOBIA

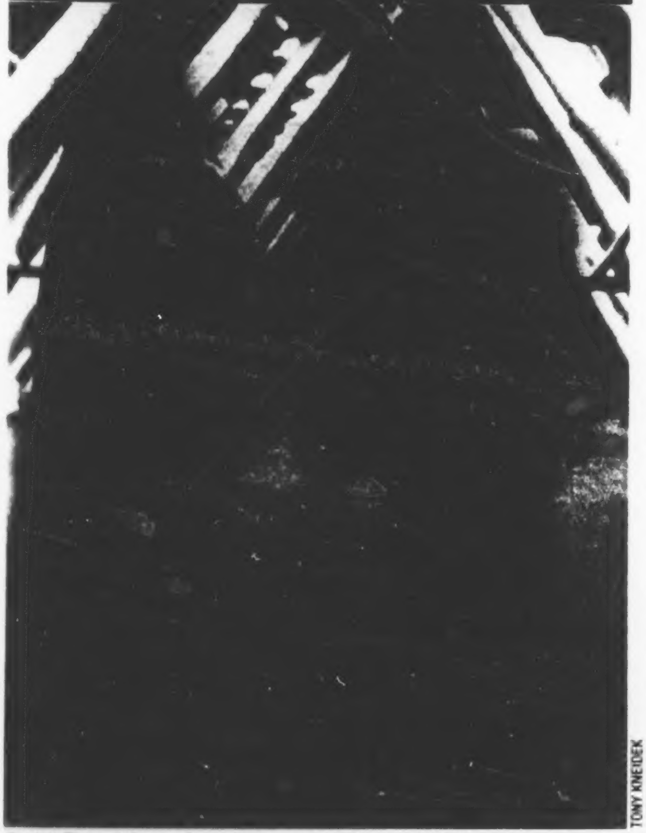
Discrimination and Violence Can Make "Coming Out" a Dangerous Choice

A lot of kids are terrified the first time they visit one of the five Portland-area support groups for sexual minority youth. Group leaders tell stories of kids lingering in front of the building or peeking through the door on meeting nights before finding the courage to go in. Other kids slip inside the building and dart out again, or call on the phone only to hang up when someone answers.

That scary first step inside can be a big stride toward self-acceptance and belonging. Ruth Gibian has seen dramatic changes in kids who've spent even a few evenings at Windfire, the support group she helps lead. "I've seen such fast recovery," she says. "Kids who come in and shake and shiver and tremble, who don't say a word for two weeks. By week three, four, or five, they're fine. They're not depressed. They're not talking about suicide or running away from home anymore."

But the price for healing is self-disclosure in a society where sexual minorities often are reviled and assaulted, and where far-right groups have made them targets for discrimination. Consider these facts:

- Twenty-six percent of gay and lesbian youth leave home early because of conflicts with their families over their sexual identities, according to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.
- Twenty-eight percent of gay and lesbian youth drop out of school because of harassment resulting from their sexual orientation, the Task Force reports.
- Twenty percent of street youth in a Portland survey, and 40 percent of street youth in a Seattle survey, identified themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, the Task Force on Sexual Minority Youth reports.
- The 1989 *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide* found that gay and lesbian youth are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth. The report estimated that up to 30 percent of completed youth suicides are committed by lesbian and gay youth annually.
- A study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Justice reported that "homosexuals are probably the most frequent victims" of hate crimes.
- In a study of young lesbians, 83 percent had used alcohol, 56 percent had used other drugs, and 11 percent had used crack or cocaine in the three months preceding the study, according to the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies.



TONY KNEIDEK

Rachel Ebora (left) and Susan Baker were met by discrimination and harassment when they "came out" in adolescence.

Susan Baker, who was an honor student and yearbook editor at Glencoe High School in Hillsboro, Oregon, suffered verbal abuse and isolation when other students learned of her sexual orientation during her senior year. "My girlfriend and I were harassed at great length by the young men," Baker recalls. "They'd yell 'dyke' at us. My very, very best friend totally dissed me. She couldn't handle it."

Baker attributes the hostility of her classmates to the turmoil caused by their own emerging sexuality and their attempts to sort out sexual roles and relationships. The *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide* published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services supports this view. "Nowhere are the harshly negative attitudes towards homosexuality more pronounced than in junior (high) and high school," the report notes. "Homosexuality and gender nonconformity are threats to many youth as an easy target for their fears and anxieties about being 'normal.'"

Many young lesbians and the adults who assist them agree that schools are unsupportive and unsafe for sexual minorities. Rosalind Lund, a teacher at Glencoe High School, says sexual minority students "really do get a hard time in subtle ways." Teachers, she says, need to stand up for sexual minority youth. "I, personally, have taken a strong stance for my gay and lesbian youth. A teacher can't be passive."

While schools and the society they reflect have taken a stance against racism and the harassment, violence, and discrimination it breeds, most have not taken a similar position against homophobia. "School staff need to recognize that homophobia is illegitimate, just like sexual harassment or racism," Baker says. "Teachers and administrators need to be highly aware that there are sexual minority kids out there and be available to talk in a nonjudgmental fashion. They need to stand up for kids and respect who they are."

Coming to terms with a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity is tough enough for European Americans. But kids of color often endure even greater stigma and isolation than their white peers because many ethnic communities are less tolerant of same-sex relationships than the dominant culture. Gay and lesbian kids of color are 12 times more likely to commit suicide than heterosexual youth (as compared with two or three times for all gay and lesbian youth), according to the *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide*.

Rachel Ebora's mother accused her of turning her back on her Filipino heritage when she came out as bisexual at age 18. Ebora, who works as a labor organizer, became aware of her attraction to females when she was an elementary student at a Catholic girls school. "The typical Filipino daughter thing to do is to have a boyfriend and be engaged to be married," Ebora says.

"Nowhere are the harshly negative attitudes towards homosexuality more pronounced than in junior (high) and high school. Homosexuality and gender nonconformity are threats to many youth as an easy target for their fears and anxieties about being 'normal.'"

Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Within that environment, Ebora says, she often keeps her sexual identity to herself, fearing the ostracism and even physical danger that could threaten her or her family if she were more open.

HIV/AIDS A Growing Problem

Myndi Giedt, who helps lead the Portland support group Awakenings, estimates that 90 percent of the kids who come through her group drink and/or use other drugs. Of those, 50 percent to 60 percent "could have a problem," she says. Along with the risk for drug abuse comes the risk for HIV/AIDS. While the risk of AIDS for gay males has been clearly established and is widely known, the risk to lesbians has not been adequately addressed.

"Most of the education around safer sex and HIV/AIDS is focused toward men," Giedt says. "We're not talking to young lesbians, saying, 'Protect yourself.' We're only talking to young gay men."

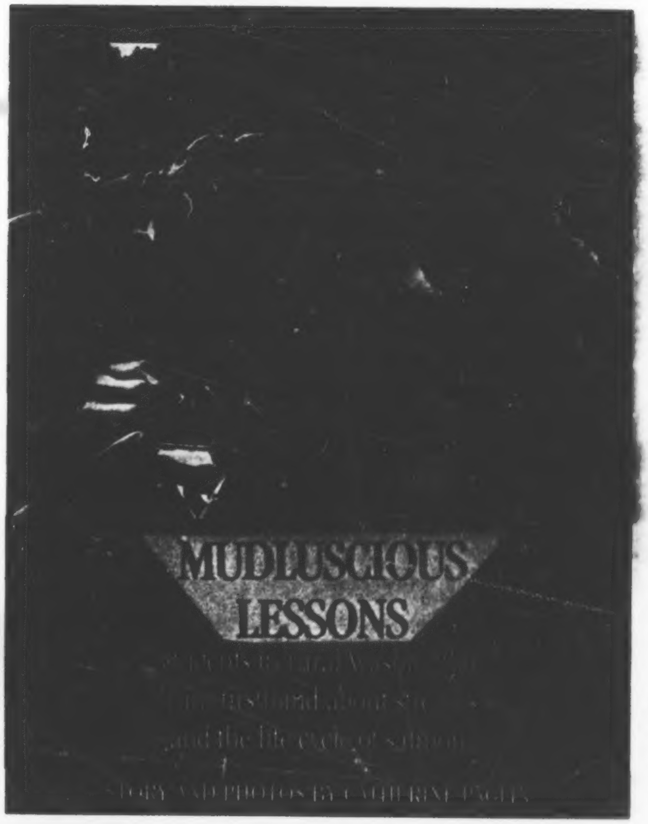
Young gay and lesbians' involvement in the sex industry as dancers or prostitutes also increase the risk of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

In *Oregon's Sexual Minority Youth: An At-Risk Population*, the Task Force on Sexuality Minority Youth notes: "Gay and lesbian youth are often thrown out of their homes by their families when their homosexuality is discovered. Given the frequent dramatic rise in family conflicts upon learning that a child is homosexual, adolescents often run away from home.

Notes Shala Moaydei of the Urban League: "The kids I have met were homeless as soon as they came out, and in order to have some money, the first thing they did was to sell themselves or get involved with drug dealers."

While some kids leave home because of conflicts with parents over sexual identity, others choose the street because it offers freedom and diversity. "The street is more than just a place you get dumped onto when you're turned out from your home," says E. Ann Hinds of VOICES (which stands for Voices of Individual and Community Empowerment from the Street). "It's also a place that you want to come to in order to find someone like you or someone who might be able to give you support or at least understand or accept you."

A longer version of this story appeared in the Oregon Girls Advocate. *Fall 1994.* ■



MUDLUSCIOUS LESSONS

[illegible] in rural Washington [illegible] firsthand about str[illegible] and the life cycle of salmon

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CATHERINE [illegible]

The forest can be deceiving. To the casual onlooker, it appears to be saturated in earth-tone greens and browns. But a closer look reveals the shiny yellow skunk cabbages, delicate purple bleeding hearts, wild roses waving chartreuse blossoms, and quiet white trilliums.

The bright slickers and backpacks of six students from the Battle Ground School District also provide splashes of color in this wet spring landscape. The Amboy Middle School students slog through brush and grass, climb over fallen logs, slip in mud, and cross and recross a cold, swift current on their way along a 1.5 mile stretch of Cedar Creek in Southwest Washington.

The students are accompanied by a teacher and biologists from the U.S. Forest Service and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The biologists are evaluating the stream to make suggestions for restoration that will be done by landowners and private groups. The students are there to learn firsthand about different elements of aquatic habitat and how their health affects fish populations. There hands-on learning has been inspired by teachers who believe in community-based learning, a grant from the Forest Service, in-kind contributions from Fish and Wildlife, and the students' own initiative.

"That passion for learning—it's hard to feel that when you're reading about someone else's experience," says Gina Garlie, a third-year Amboy eighth-grade teacher who helped facilitate the grant. Garlie is a former Forest Service employee who worked with biologists and researchers doing curriculum development. That experience has helped her to understand that science is "more than just the academics." She wants students at Amboy to have the same appreciation for science as a living, hands-on, and dynamic discipline.

"By seeing what is good habitat for streams, the students can really understand the components—what we mean by 'ground cover' or 'a hole,'" she says.

One teacher and up to seven sixth- and eighth-grade students take part in each of six field outings with biologists Debbie Hollen of the Forest Service and Lisa Harlan of Fish and Wildlife. To be selected for the survey project, students had to answer four essay questions and have parental permission.

Students are assigned responsibilities such as identifying and measuring pools deeper than three feet, identifying logs wider than three feet and longer than 50 feet, measuring water velocity, observing streamside cover and erosion, and looking for "redds," the nests in the stream bed where salmon lay their eggs.

Kids Deciding Values for Adulthood

Landowner Rick Dunning meets students at the beginning of the stream survey and is eager to see the completed data sheets. Dunning, a tree farmer, has been replanting cedar along the creek, even though this is an area that by law he will not be able to harvest. "He has a lot of respect for nature," says Garlie. "He's trying to set a good example and the kids need to see that."

Marianne Prather, a sixth-grade teacher at Amboy Middle School, agrees. "This is the age when kids make decisions about what kind of adult they'll be," she says. Prather has tried to influence her students' environmental consciousness by demonstrating how one drop of oil can cover a surface of water. She believes the lessons have paid dividends. "I have kids in here who will never pour oil down a drain because they know it kills fish," she says.

Students who participated in the survey from Prather's class brought their field lessons back to the classroom. They recently completed a unit on the life cycle of the Chinook salmon, complete with a 55-gallon tank donated by the local public utility district and stocked with salmon eggs from the Washougal hatchery. Prather's students fed the fish; cleaned the tank; recorded the water's pH, temperature, smell, and color; and chronicled the development and survival rate of the fish in a daily journal. In addition, each student

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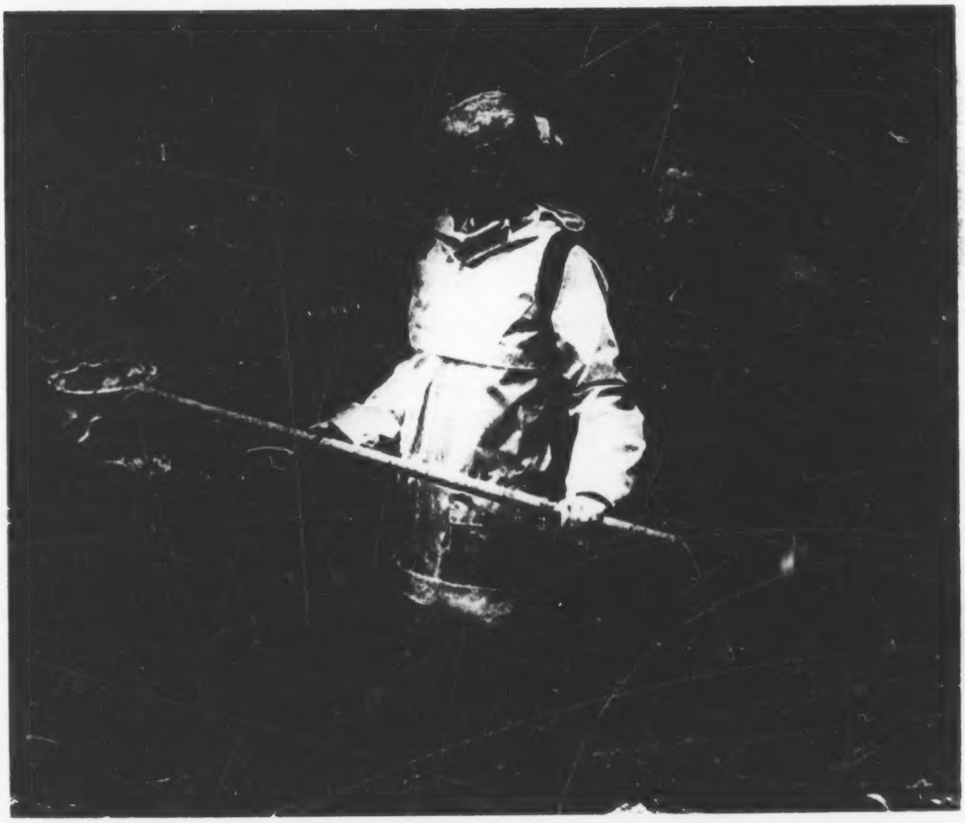
contributed to a PowerPoint presentation on the salmon's life cycle that they presented to their parents at an open house. Finally, students released the juvenile Chinook into Chelatchie Creek, which flows next to the school.



Hands-on Learning Adds Meaning to Lessons

Prather is convinced the hands-on aspect of the learning made all the difference. "That salmon unit would mean nothing to the kids without the tank," she says. At the same time, she believes that such direct experiences give meaning to what students learn in books.

The sixth-graders on the survey speak enthusiastically and knowledgeably about salmon. Sometimes, when the eighth-graders have questions, the sixth-graders can provide answers. "When the yolk sacs are gone, its called 'buttoning up,'" notes one girl. "Do you think that's one we released?" asks another sixth-grader wistfully when the group spots some juveniles in Cedar Creek.

Garlie hopes the school will receive the grant again next year, and possibly involve more students. However, student participation is limited by the logistics of transporting and supervising the groups. "If we could get something going on our own creek," Garlie says, "we could have the whole school involved."

Garlie also would like to see the field experience tied more closely to the curriculum. "I would definitely have more of a follow-up at the end," she says. For example, students could provide actual stream restoration and clean up or make presentations about salmon in other classes or at other schools.

After lunch the group nets, categorizes, and identifies aquatic insects—stoneflies, caddis flies, and mayflies—using a hand lens, tweezers, and specimen box. Hollen asks whether the students think it's good for the salmon that the stream contains a variety of insects.

"Well, if you think about us, we wouldn't really want to eat the same thing everyday," says one student.

Trade Tools Fascinate Students

Hollen, who initiated the proposal and agreement between the Battle Ground School District and the two government agencies, wanted to expose students to potential careers. And students are fascinated by the professionals' gear: the waders, the cell phone in a clear plastic case, and the glasses with polarized lenses for viewing the redds. But students are most captivated by the "Rite in the Rain, All-Weather Hip Pocket Spiral Memo," which they use to record their observations for later incorporation into the survey data sheets.

"Kids have to have a why," says Prather. "They don't have to grow up and be a fish biologist, but they should know that they can."

For more information, contact Gina Garlie, (260) 247-5426. ■

TEACHING TOGETHER

Teachers at Meridian Middle School find that integrated teams work well for students and teachers.

BY TONY KNEIDEK

MERIDIAN, IDAHO—Anyone unconvinced about the merits of "teaming" during the middle school years should talk with a group of teachers at Meridian Middle School here.

Jackie Sherman, founder and president of the Idaho Middle School Association, says that forming teams of teachers who work with the same groups of students throughout the year makes sense for all involved—teachers, parents, and, most importantly, students. The benefits for students are academic as well as social and behavioral.

"With teaming, fewer students will fall through the cracks," Sherman says. "Anything that happens with these kids, we pretty much know about as a team. We know our kids."

Sherman, a language arts teacher, also is the leader of a five-member teaching team at Meridian. For 45 minutes each day, Sherman and her fellow team members—Denise Call, Mike Kubicki, Erlene Butler, and Keven Roberts—share information about students, plot strategies, and go over curriculum, goals, and objectives. This year, student teacher Travis Fullmer also participated as a team member. Each member has specific responsibilities that contribute to the successful operation of the team. For example, Call keeps meticulous records of team proceedings, including discussions about lesson plans, phone calls to or meetings with parents, and student successes and setbacks.

"Students take up a big part of our time," notes Call. "We celebrate students who are doing well, note changes in student behavior or learning, and discuss students at risk."

A team can also develop consistent standards for assessment, behavior, and classroom procedures. That way, students know that a late paper in social studies is treated the same as a late paper in English. "We develop team policies so kids know what to expect," Call says. "That consistency is another benefit to students."

Kubicki, a social studies teacher, says that sharing information about students with other teachers helps him see kids through a multicolored prism. "I believe that the most important thing that teaming gives to kids is an opportunity to be viewed in a lot of different ways," he says. "Teams also provide a much faster alarm mechanism for interventions. And that's important. Part of the challenge with this age group is to keep kids on the edge from sliding down the hill with kids who are already running down the hill."

This focus on students also helps Donna Mikkelson and Blythe Moore to share perspectives and insights on the 60-plus students on their sixth-grade team. Mikkelson, who teaches social studies, English, and reading, and Moore, the math and science team member, share two groups of 32 students for five hours a day. "We feel an equal responsibility for those students," Mikkelson says. "We know these kids intimately. It's a transitional time for them, and we provide some stability in their lives."

Teamwork is a Learned Skill

Mikkelson and Moore, who have been team teaching for about six years, liken their relationship to that of a married couple. "The Number One thing you need to make a team successful is time together," Moore says. "You have to get to know each other's personal communication styles. You have to organize and to state your needs to your partner. And you have to respect your differences."

"Teaming is like a marriage," Mikkelson adds. "You have to allow for personal growth and doing things differently. Sometimes, if it's not working out, a friendly divorce may be in order. If it gets to the point of stagnating and bumping heads all the time, then it's time to say enough."

Staff development and inservice are critical to the successful shift to a team concept. "People need to understand what a team is," Sherman says. "A team needs to be goal oriented. Team members need to be familiar with what others are doing. There needs to be some guidance and vision in putting together team units. The team's vision gives purpose to what you do with students."

Sherman maintains that schools should begin preparing teachers a year before they begin working in teams. They will need to build a knowledge base and vision for how their teams will work, determine who will work together well, and build staff and community support for the approach. "You need to get people excited," Sherman says. "You need to get people on board."

Ongoing Staff Development Necessary

Staff development should continue for at least the first three years of implementation. It should cover areas such as defining a team, how to form teams, creativity and teamwork, coordinating lesson plans, working with others, effective communication, student assessment, integrating curriculum, and team evaluation.

TONY KNEIDEK

Theme Parks, Exploration, and Good Teachers

Macy Ann Hack could hardly wait to talk to a visitor to her classroom at Meridian Middle School. In fact, she didn't wait. Macy finished her poetry early, then volunteered her views on middle school, friendship, and learning.

"Middle school is pretty easy," she says. "You get more freedom. And people think you're more mature and grown-up. That's what my mom thinks anyhow. She makes me do my own housework now."

Macy says she hopes to someday be a professional actor or artist. "I enjoy learning art and drama because it gives you a chance to let your imagination go wild," she says. "I also like architecture. I went to Las Vegas this year and I got to explore the theme parks. They were totally cool."

Macy also says she likes to explore new subjects, investigate exotic places, and study French, the exploratory language class for Meridian sixth-graders.

"Exploratory classes are a good challenge for us," she says. "They give us a good idea about what we want to be in high school and college."

And someday, Macy says, she plans to attend college. "My hope is that I will make it into a good college and get a good job, but I don't want that to be ruined by a dumb mistake."

Middle school is not all fun and games. Peer pressure, Macy says, has already led some of her friends to join gangs. "The only problem with middle school is we have the drugs and the violence and the gangs," she says. "I don't get involved with that stuff because I think it's incompetent and stupid."

Good teachers, Macy says, can go a long way in helping students make responsible decisions. "What makes a good teacher," she adds, "is understanding, love, and caring."

—*Tony Kneidek*

State and national middle school conferences are excellent places for teachers to connect with others who have successfully implemented team approaches. "It's really important for administration to hold teams accountable and to keep them going," Sherman says. "A team absolutely needs a sense of esteem. That comes from noting your successes, evaluating your efforts, and growing from your mistakes. It comes from seeing that you are doing something good for kids."

Working with other teachers—sharing strategies, communicating student needs, and developing policies—has positive effects on the individual teacher, as well. "I see what works for my colleagues, and I learn from that," Sherman says. "I become a better teacher."

Sherman says that once teachers have worked on a team, it is unlikely that they will want to return to isolated assignments. "Once you've done it, you'll always want to do it. I just feel like a more creative and effective teacher because of it. And as a team member, I'm better able to address the needs of students."

Tween-Agers

Too Big to be Little,
too Little to be Big

A group of sixth-graders taps out lines of poetry on computers as teacher Donna Mikkelson offers guidance and encouragement to her young writers.

Their topic—lessons their moms and dads taught them—is a way of paying tribute to parents, says Mikkelson, who teaches social studies, reading, and English to 64 sixth-graders as part of a two-teacher team at Meridian Middle School in Idaho. "The lessons," she adds, "can be simple, like teaching you to catch a ball, or abstract, like teaching the difference between right and wrong."

Student Taylor Bowen scans his poem, then responds to a visitor's question. "The most important lesson from my dad was probably that he's helped me to play sports," he says. "He likes going camping and he's helped me with that, too. My mom has taught me how to use my manners, and how to clean up so I can keep myself organized."

Sports, camping, and tidiness: In a world filled with negative stereotypes about young people, it can be refreshing to spend time with a group of adolescents. Middle school students are thoughtful, caring, rebellious, confused, frustrated, and hopeful young people. They dread homework, thrive in hands-on learning environments, argue with their parents, resent their new role as built-in babysitter to younger siblings, cherish their friends, love their families, and have fears ranging from monsters and the dark to drugs and death.

They often see themselves as being stuck between the carefree days behind them and the more responsible days that lie ahead. "Middle school is a place between little grade school and big grade school," says one Idaho seventh-grader.

Katie Rhode, a seventh-grader at Hellgate Middle School in Montana, says the contradictions about the 'tween years are abstract as well as concrete. "I'm too old for playland at McDonald's," she says, "but I'm too young to drive or to vote. I am eager for what is in the future, yet I dread growing up and leaving my friends. I wish that the fun times I have had would never end. I'd live in that world of my funnest times, but I'd really like to know what the future has in store."

Even the fears of these young people reflect the transitional phase of life they are experiencing. "I am scared of what the future is going to be like, and I'm afraid of the dark," writes one middle school student from Idaho. "The things I fear," notes another student, "are death, monsters, and grades." Adds another sixth-grader, "I fear guns and summer school."

In personal interviews and classroom essays, students in Montana, Idaho, and Oregon discussed their lives, their hopes, their fears, and their joys. During early adolescence, they want more responsibility, more freedom, and the room to make mistakes. "I like to be free and to make my own decisions, even if sometimes they are wrong," writes Holly Anderson of Missoula.

Peer group pressure and negative images of adolescents also shape kids' self-images. Brad Fredericks, also of Missoula, says kids are vulnerable to the messages and pressures they see and hear. "I think that half the teens that do bad things . . . do them because their friends want them to or because they want to be cool and fit in," Fredericks says. And adults also play a role in how their children grow and mature. "Maybe if all the people that chose to have kids would take control and discipline them, there wouldn't be so much teen crime in the world."

Middle schoolers' hopes often are offset by their fears. They want to go to college, but fear it will cost too much. "I plan on finishing high school and college and training to become a registered nurse," says one student. "What scares me is having to get a scholarship for college." They also want good jobs, but fear that they won't be available. "I hope I can get rich and go to college and barely even work because I'm so well off," says one student. "My fear," he adds, "is that prices will grow and I can't find a job and I'll live in a neon green house that's a mess."

Middle school students also want to live in a peaceful world, but fear that violence will escalate. "As our city grows," says Alexis Neufeld, "violence and drugs become more and more. Sometimes I go to sleep fearing that I might never wake up again. I hope that one day we may all live in peace."

Middle schoolers' joys and frustrations also reflect their interactions with teachers, parents, and friends. Listening to middle school-age youth defies the popular perception that all they want to do is break away from family and fly solo. "My family is very important to me," writes Crystal Hooper, a student at George Middle School in Portland. "They love me, and I love them. They are the ones that have a roof for me to live under. They pay the bills, buy me clothes, and give me meals because they care about me."

Kids want the respect of adults

"I like to be free and to make my own decisions, even if sometimes they are wrong."
—Holly Anderson

"I don't fear anything in the future, because anything that happens, happens for a certain reason."
—Jamie Davidson

around them, but sometimes feel they are judged by how they look instead of who they are. "Other people think middle school students are stupid unless they talk the right way, dress the right way, and look the right way," laments one Idaho sixth-grader. Another 12-year-old says that adults don't listen to kids. "I don't like being my age because adults don't respect me and they don't listen to me."

Other students, though, say their relationships with adults are positive, open, and mutually respectful. "All the teachers I've ever had have listened to and respected me," says Hellgate seventh-grader Amanda Babon. "I believe that is because I give them the same respect they give me." Adds Meridian student Taylor Bowen, "I feel that most adults listen to and respect me because they help me. If I have an opinion, they will listen to it."

Middle schoolers show a high degree of independent thought. However, they agree on one thing: They learn best when they are engaged, involved, and doing things. They repeatedly (and independently) refer to "fun activities," "hands-on learning," and field trips as ways in which they learn best. Low on the list of learning activities are lectures and homework.

"A good day in middle school," says Hellgate student Danielle Taylor, "is when the teachers don't bore you to death with long stupid speeches, and they teach us with hands-on experiments so we're not always reading out of the book. A good day is also when the teachers take a break on work and, like, take us outside."

"Middle school," notes 14-year-old Lindsay Pierce, "is a lot more exciting than elementary school because you get to do things."

Adds Robbie Haynie: "I enjoy learning about bridges and how they work. It was fun to make bridges out of toothpicks."

Amanda Burgess, another Meridian middle schooler, agrees with the hands-on approach. "I enjoy learning about science like elements, oceans, and plants," she says. "My favorite is probably chemistry or where you dissect things."

Through all their fears and the issues they face, middle school students remain, by and large, a hopeful, optimistic group. They want to fit into the world and see themselves doing so in a variety of ways. "I fit in the world in nature, where the soul is free and looks don't matter," says Heather Mcalpine of Hellgate Middle School. "When I'm in nature, I feel comfortable and enjoy my surroundings. Everything is happy and so I, too, am happy."

Some middle school students seek to blend in; others to stand out. And some, like Jamie Davidson of Hellgate Middle School, see themselves in a metamorphic stage. "I think I fit into the world like a grain of sand on a beach—not being anyone too special to stand out," she says. "My hope for the future is to become a grain of sand that does stand out.

"I want to be someone who makes a difference in another person's life," Davidson says. "I could possibly see myself teaching physical education or counseling those in need. I don't fear anything in the future, because anything that happens, happens for a certain reason." ■

Parents: Stick with Kids Through Middle Years

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University have identified six types of parent involvement that can help keep kids engaged in school and connected to family. They are:
1. Receive basic information on such topics as health, safety and discipline, guidance, and adolescent development
2. Receive information on your child's progress and about important transitions from elementary to middle and from middle to high school
3. Volunteer for or support extracurricular activities
4. Engage in learning activities at home—this type of participation is most likely to increase student achievement
5. Involve yourself in decision-making activities or on decision-making boards, such as school advisory committees and school improvement teams
6. Collaborate with others in the community, such as churches, businesses, social agencies, civic groups, and other organizations that have an interest in children

The researchers found that type two activities above were the most common, while type four were the most difficult to organize.

Parents also can assess a school's willingness to provide meaningful opportunities for involvement by looking at volunteer opportunities; content and clarity of written materials, such as newsletters, brochures, and other school information publications; whether the publications are translated into other languages; representation on school committees; willingness of teachers to discuss curriculum, discipline, and other issues; and inclusion of a parent room in the school. ■

Editor's note: In March, Susannah Lightbourne-Maynard, an eighth-grader from Sellwood Middle School in Portland, traveled to Sonoma State University in California for a math and science conference for eighth-grade girls. The following essay is an account of that experience that she wrote for Northwest Education.

At the end of March, I had an experience that not too many girls get to have: I went to a math and science conference for eighth-grade girls at Sonoma State University in California. The day was filled with speeches, active learning, and hands-on activities.

After everyone had gone through registration, I went to the auditorium to listen to women speakers in the math and science profession. They talked about how important it is for young women in their teens to get involved in math and science, because most girls think that math and science are generally guy things. I was hoping that a lot of girls at the conference had an assertive attitude about math and science because what the speakers were saying was very important. They are women who have gone through what girls my age are going through now. They know what it's like and want to be able to show us how to handle the good and the bad. I think they got all of us to look at math and science in a different way. It was head-on information.

Personally, I'm addicted to math and science, especially anything that has to do with space. My love for math and science comes from my own curiosity and a couple of teachers I've had. My science teacher, Mr. Eric Bergmark, is so enthusiastic. He says that everyone can have fun in science and told us to get "psyched." He also made everything seem not so complicated.

My math teacher, Mr. Gary Davidson, is the same way. He got me to look at math as something I could tackle with ease. I felt that I was the one in control and math has become so much easier.

I THINK THE WAY TO GET girls involved in science is to find out what they are interested in, then work from there at their pace. Of course, you have to use hands-on projects as much as possible—not boring paperwork! One of the things Mr. Bergmark did was hold star parties. On clear nights, students and parents were invited to come to a nearby park and take a look at the stars through Mr. Bergmark's GIANT telescope. It was a lot of fun. It made space seem so cool!

After all the adults spoke, we listened to a girl who is a junior in high school talk about her positive opinions of math and science. She spoke of how one should be challenged in life, and if you're not it might become boring. I totally agree with her. I'm in eighth grade. In seventh grade, I didn't challenge myself and I became bored. This year has become quite the challenge, and I love it!

After all the great speeches at the conference were over, it was time to begin class. Everyone was signed up for different courses. The first one I had was creating computer graphics. It was so much fun! We were able to do so many things on the computer that I never thought we could do. The instructor has designed many popular computer graphics, such as the giraffe for Toys 'R' Us. We found out that when the artwork goes on the cardboard, only four colors have been used: black, red, yellow, and blue. When you combine those colors, it looks like thousands of colors. On the computer, you can do things to your artwork like blowing up its face or other parts like a balloon, or make the artwork collapse on itself. You can also crystallize it and use other effects. There are tons more, but I can't list them all. It was definitely a great time.

After an hour we went to our second class, "Digging up the past." It was about geoarcheology, which is a way to find out about the people, climate, and land forms that existed years ago by looking at the soil. This was also a blast!

My friend and I analyzed soil using acid and water. We learned about some of the tools used in geoarcheology like a table to find out what kind of dirt we had (ours was clay). We also used a book that had different colors of dirt in it that we could match with our dirt. We also used brushes, picks, and our hands to feel the texture of the dirt, which helped us define our soil. Our "dig" went back about 800 years! Because our soil was clay, we could tell it was from a wet climate. Our teacher guessed it came from somewhere in Canada.

Soon the class was over and it was lunchtime. Even then, we kept our minds challenged: Everyone was provided math and science puzzles to solve.

AFTER LUNCH IT WAS TIME for another project: Adopt-A-Watershed. We learned about all the organisms and other life that exist in watersheds. We also played a game in a field where we threw toothpicks everywhere, then pretended we were eagles that had to find worms—the toothpicks. This helped us see how hard it is for animals to sometimes find food.

At the end of the day we went into the auditorium for a closing session. The main message I came away with is: If there is something out there that you are interested in, don't let things get in your way. You can do anything. I also learned to always challenge myself and to remember to make those challenges fun. The whole day was such a great experience! I hope more girls and boys get involved in science and mathematics. It's worth it.

Susannah Lightbourne-Maynard graduated this spring from Sellwood Middle School in Portland, Oregon.

"And the walls came tumbling down."

—*Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho*

This refrain from an old spiritual could be the theme for innovative middle school programs that are toppling the traditional boundaries separating classroom from home, schoolhouse from community. When education ventures beyond the school building, book learning becomes brook learning. And workplace learning. And neighborhood learning. It's the ultimate in hands-on: letting students take their hands—and minds—into the community to work on real projects with real consequences for the quality of their lives.

Here's a look at a few such programs and projects:

SLAM DUNK. An Oregon middle school found a way to tie learning to a passion of many middle schoolers: professional basketball. When the Oregon Arena Project began breaking ground a few years ago for the $260 million sports complex in Portland, teachers and students at Calapooia Middle School in Albany used the project as a live learning laboratory. With support from the Portland Trail Blazers, the Oregon Department of Education, and other state and local organizations, Calapooia developed curriculum packets loaded with all kinds of activities related to the building project. Using the packets, kids at more than 250 Oregon schools learned about blueprints, tower cranes, building codes, construction garbage, and lots of other construction details. Activities included:

- Calculating the minimum number of toilets, sinks, and drinking fountains the building should have to meet state building codes based on building occupancy
- Investigating the special safety measures designed by arena architects and engineers to prevent earthquake damage to the building
- Investigating the composition and stability of sediment under the building and predicting the effects of various strengths of earthquakes
- Determining the percentage of home games versus road games of the National Basketball Association's Trail Blazer team
- Calculating how many dump truck loads were needed to haul away the dirt excavated for the arena
- Determining how many loads it would take for a tower crane to lift 45 tons of steel

To help Calapooia kids develop the packets, the Trail Blazers provided construction blueprints, heavy equipment models, team statistics, recycling plans, traffic management plans, and other materials.

Teacher Diane Smith, who spearheaded the project, says real-life connections bring learning alive for students. "Being able to associate schoolwork with an NBA team like the Portland Trail Blazers was an obvious bonus," Smith said at the project's inception in late 1993. "We hope to give students a taste of what different careers are like and the wide variety of career options open to them."

For more information, call Diane Smith at West Albany High School, (541) 967-4545.

RED WRIGGLERS. Garbage-eating worms. Solar-powered ovens. These are just two of many earth-friendly topics that middle school students in the Bend-La Pine School District cover in an environmental program that links learning with lifestyles.

The Central Oregon district's sixth-graders learn how to make responsible choices about garbage, water, energy, and consumption in their own lives. A structured action program, *Journey for the Planet*, developed by Global Action Plan of Woodstock, New York, guides students toward lifestyle changes that preserve resources and reduce pollution. A workbook directs students on a journey toward preservation and protection of the Earth.

"To me, the journeys proved that one little person can make a huge difference," says Carly Hood, a student at Pilot Butte Middle School.

Besides directing students toward personal change, the program pulls in people from the wider community. For example:

- AmeriCorps members lead in-class experiments, such as analyzing oxygen content in local water sources.
- The owner of a local recycling company visits classrooms with his "red wrigglers"—a bin of garbage-eating worms that compost food scraps and paper. After students touch the worms and ask questions, an AmeriCorps member helps them build their own worm bin from recycled cookie containers. Students watch the worms over time as they reproduce and turn garbage into usable compost.

- A university extension agent brings a solar cooker to class, and explains how other fuels deplete resources.

Asserts Carly Hood: "We want to save the world so that the next generation can share what we shared."

For more information, contact Linda "Bo" Hanson, a science teacher at Bend High School, (541) 383-6324 or (541) 383-6290.

GENDER BENDER. When girls reach adolescence, their self-esteem often plunges and their aspirations falter, according to recent studies by the American Association of University Women and others. What's more, they typically see few female role models in the fields of math, science, and engineering—fields that offer high salaries and prestige in an increasingly technology-based economy.

To encourage adolescent girls to set their sights high and to consider careers in math and science, the Saturday Academy at the Oregon Graduate Institute for Science and Technology is hooking girls up with mentors and role models. College women specializing in math or science and professional women working in related fields are lending their support and experience through Advocates for Women in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics (AWSEM), designed and funded by the National Science Foundation.

In partnership with Portland businesses and universities, the project lets girls from four Portland-area middle schools and three high schools see science and math in action. For example, one role model, Monique Johnson, a graduate student in biochemistry and molecular biology, recently took several groups of girls through the laboratory at the Graduate Institute.

"Students can actually see that what they study in class is part of a real job," Johnson says. "During the presentation I did for the kids, I talked about cloning genes. A girl said, 'You actually *do* that?' She was incredulous that she could meet someone who actually does that.

"We had them do a few different lab procedures. We had them wear the coat and the goggles and the gloves. At first they were kind of afraid, and then they just thought it was cool."

For more information, call (503) 690-1261.

—Lee Sherman Caudell

REALITY CHECK. Spreading the word about innovative, community-based middle school programs is the mission of a new federally funded project. Called Reality Check, it seeks to put staff from successful programs in touch with those who want to start similar efforts.

The reason? "Linking middle school kids with community resources is a very effective way of improving academic skills," says Dr. Larry McClure, project administrator and director of the Education and Work Program at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. A growing number of Northwest middle schools are implementing job shadowing, service learning, mentoring, Internet resources, and other methods of linking schools with the broader community to achieve various learning objectives.

Reality Check provides a flexible, direct means of sharing promising practices to improve teaching and learning and encourage systemic change. At the core of Reality Check is a Peer Assistance Network, now under construction. Peer consultants are put in direct touch with other middle schools and communities. Over a period of months, teachers, administrators, and community volunteers will work with requesting sites either in person, at either site, or by phone, mail, e-mail, or teleconference.

"It's putting the people who do it with the people who want to do it," McClure says. "We're just an intermediary." Twenty consultants have been identified representing a spectrum of teaching and learning approaches. In the second year of the project, the number of consultants will increase to 50.

Similarly, School/Work Action Teams (SWAT), rather than individuals, will be used to address school or districtwide middle school/community connections. Reality Check will identify exemplary middle schools from urban, rural, and suburban areas to match with sites that want to embark on a consulting relationship lasting a year or more. Consulting teams can include school personnel as well as people from the community or other agencies. NWREL staff will also join SWAT teams when needed. Reality Check will pay for some travel and communications costs, but the requesting site or district will usually be expected to cover most expenses.

During the first year, Reality Check is focusing on the state of Washington. In the second year, the program will expand to the five-state Pacific Northwest region. Plans call for partnerships with the National Middle School Association and school-to-work organizations as well as national dissemination of the model.

In addition to facilitating the consulting process, Reality Check will provide quarterly research updates for program administrators and policymakers on community partnerships and curriculum integration; maintain an item bank of assessment tools for applied learning; and provide a materials and media resource center containing print materials, videotapes, and software available for onsite review and loan. A newsletter available on the Reality Check home page (http://www.nwrel.org/edwork/reality/) shares promising practices.

You can nominate your school for the Reality Check database by contacting Larry McClure, Reality Check, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 SW Main, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204, phone: 503-275-9597, fax: 503-275-0443 or 800-547-6339 ext. 597 (8:30-5 p.m. PST), e-mail: mcclurel@nwrel.org.

—Catherine Paglin

BLOCK SCHEDULING, THE COMBINING of two or more periods, is among the hot topics in middle schools today. The National Middle School Association (NMSA) says that about 20 percent of middle-level schools use some form of flexible scheduling, be it block scheduling, alternate day classes, rotating schedules, or dropped schedule.

In a research summary on flexible scheduling, the NMSA notes: "With large blocks of time to facilitate involvement, students benefit from less fragmentation and more engagement in project-based learning and interdisciplinary activities, promoting skill application, interpersonal relations, and decisionmaking skills related to concrete, relevant problems. Results indicate increased student engagement and achievement and positive social ramifications.

We listened to the online discussions of educators on the MIDDLE-L Listserv. The discussion was triggered when a Yakima, Washington, teacher asked for advice about how teachers work best in block scheduling situations. An edited version of the discussion follows.

OUR MIDDLE SCHOOL will go from a traditional seven-period day with one personal planning period daily for each teacher to a block schedule, which will include one personal planning period and one team planning period per day. The block of academic time will be for five periods, during which students will receive instruction from their interdisciplinary team of teachers. Students will spend the other two periods of time in PE, music, and exploratory classes.

As a staff, we are very excited and also nervous about how this will go. We have been teamed for about five years and have continued to move to pure teams and common planning time, as well as incorporating interdisciplinary instruction. We are working toward more integrated instruction and hope the team planning will give us the much needed time to reach our goals.

My questions: Many teachers are confused about how a team of three, four, or five teachers will use this block of time. Does it mean some teachers will "give up" time? How have others looked at this time and made it work for everyone on the team?

Also, how have teams dealt with special ed and ESL students who are currently either pulled out for one or more periods per day or "dropped in" for one or more periods, depending on the IEP of each student?

Harriet Young
Wilson Middle School
Yakima, Washington

ONE QUICK THOUGHT FOR YOU AND YOUR TEAM: To take full advantage of the academic block will require a paradigm shift from the assumption inherent in your phrase "will receive instruction from" to a view of the team as a community of learners, all of whom are active in determining what is to be studied and how those topics or questions might best be pursued. Frontal, passive "instruction" gives way to engaging activities with students and teachers planning the foundation. Having the academic block is a real opportunity, but exploiting it to enhance learning requires a shift from the traditional ways of instruction. Good luck.

John H. Lounsbury
NMSA Publications

THE BLOCK OF TIME ought to be for the team to decide how to use. In the case of the four-person team I worked on, we each usually divided our block into fourths and spread the students into four groups. That is, we created typical class periods. However, sometimes we'd see half the students one day and the other half the next day for double periods if we needed extra time. If an assembly or other activity interrupted the day, we'd divide whatever time was left to us into equal parts so we'd see everyone during the day. As for special ed students, we were involved in "Class-Within-A-Class," where the special ed teacher came into our classrooms rather than having the students leave.

Howard Miller
Associate Professor of
Middle School Education
Lincoln University
Jefferson, Missouri

WE HAVE A SIMILAR SCHEDULE TO WHAT YOU PLAN. It is wonderful. Sometimes we have a traditional day where students move from one class to the next. On other days, we may block our time, and students would have two subjects. Another day might bring integrated activities. Our team believes it is important to make use of the time as needed to meet our goals. As you can see we must be flexible, yet realistic. Good luck!

Jo E. Read
Leawood Middle School
Kansas City, Missouri

WE ADOPTED THAT SYSTEM (somewhat modified) this year and have had great results. Our teachers have one planning period a day; as a team, they meet four times a week. If anything, teachers have found that there is not enough time; several times, they have continued to meet from the team planning period through their personal planning time. They do all sorts of things: meet with students (problems and commendations), hold parent conferences, plan activities and interdisciplinary units, plan field trips, discuss student progress, do scheduling of students. I have seen more interdisciplinary work this year than ever in the past. An added benefit is that discipline problems have been reduced—teachers catch things much earlier now and, as a team, address any concerns they have about students.

We added a half-team of 50 students at each grade level to reduce the number of kids per team and then reduced the number of classes a teacher teaches from five to four and used that extra period to get the team planning time.

The major drawback we have found is that the core area teams are working great and use the planning time very effectively; we have not, though, found a way to involve the unified teachers as much as we would like and they have a feeling of real isolation. That is still a work in progress.

We have a skill center where kids get academic support from the core area teachers, the foreign languages classes are taught and the special education (SPED) youngsters can get their support; we try to pull as few kids out of the classes as possible. This seems to be working. We have assigned one SPED teacher to two teams and at one of the weekly team times, the SPED teacher meets with the core teachers. Hope this helps.

Dr. Jurgen Combs
Mt. Anthony Middle School,
Bennington, VT 05201

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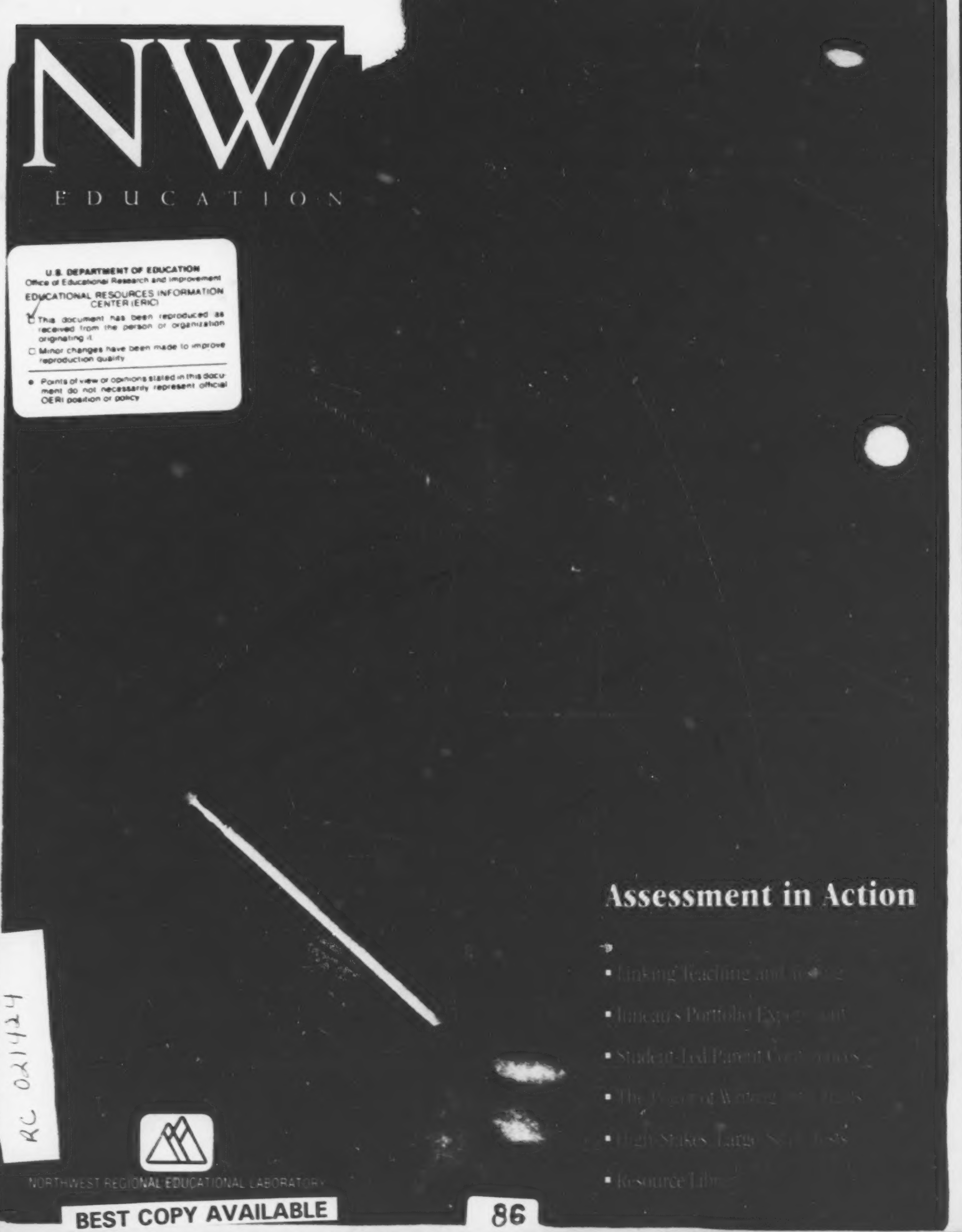

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NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

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COVER PHOTO: JOELINE PEDERSON, A STUDENT AT HARBORVIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN JUNEAU, ALASKA, REFLECTS ON HER GROWTH AS A READER AND WRITER. PHOTOGRAPHED BY PETER METCALFE OF JUNEAU.

Bursting the Bubbles

SCHOOLS ARE QUESTIONING THE WORKHORSE OF U.S. EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT, THE STANDARDIZED TEST, AS THEY SEARCH FOR MORE AUTHENTIC WAYS TO GAUGE STUDENT PERFORMANCE

When U.S. gymnast Kerri Strug chalked her hands and stretched her muscles before competing in Atlanta last summer, her goals were clear: Get good lift on the mount. Don't over-rotate the dismount. Nail the double-twisting Yurchenko. Stick the landing. For Strug, the standards for a 10 were as solid and familiar as the balance beam beneath her feet.

Olympic athletes win by knowing exactly what a gold-medal performance looks like. But the clear targets and exacting standards that Strug and her teammates strove for during years of training often elude students in America's classrooms. Learning goals are fuzzy. State and district standards are buried in policy manuals. Assessment methods don't match teaching practices. Progressive schools teach students to solve problems, work in teams, think creatively, and be innovative. But many of those same schools then line students up in rows, hand them standardized test booklets, give them No. 2 pencils, and tell them to fill in the bubbles.

American schoolchildren take 100 million standardized tests a year. If the average test has 100 multiple-choice questions, students fill in 10 billion bubbles annually. But those bubbles are beginning to burst as educators and policymakers acknowledge that too often, schools fail to test what they teach. Or, conversely, schools tailor curriculum to fit multiple-choice tests that measure memorization and fact-retention instead of critical thinking and other complex skills we want kids to acquire.

As schools increasingly stress active learning over rote learning, meaning over mechanics, traditional testing looks looks more and more like an outgrown warm-up suit: It's too narrow and leaves too much uncovered.

A revolution in assessment is under way at every level, from individual classrooms to entire states. Sometimes the changes are ignited by teachers who are uneasy with the clash between teaching and testing. Sometimes the changes are mandated by lawmakers who want more meaningful clues to how well schools are doing. A few states are throwing out standardized tests altogether. Others are blending them with alternative methods, such as performances or portfolios.

In these pages we review the research, and we tell the stories of several Northwest communities that have undertaken a quest for better assessments—a quest that is yielding not only new ways to assess, but also new ways to teach.

OF DISCOVERY

FROM ALASKA TO VERMONT, EDUCATORS STRIVE TO DESIGN MORE ACTIVE, AUTHENTIC WAYS TO GAUGE WHAT STUDENTS KNOW AND CAN DO. THE JOURNEY'S OBJECTIVE IS TO MAKE SURE TODAY'S CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT SKILLS FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD.

By Lee Sherman Caudell

ILLUSTRATION BY JENNIFER BRADY-MORALES

In the classic Norman Rockwell classroom, tidy students sit in neat rows, listening attentively as a teacher lectures beside a chalkboard. Along with spelling bees and poetry recitations, multiple-choice tests (neat questions, tidy answers) fit perfectly into this nostalgic picture—like pigtails fit into inkwells.

But the world is a lot more complicated than it was when Rockwell painted his images of innocence and simplicity. It's a world where wild salmon are in danger of dying out. Where terrorists' bombs blow away jumbo jets and office buildings. Where people roam the earth from their keyboards. Where kids tuck handguns in their backpacks, just in case.

In a complicated world beset with planet-threatening problems, children need a lot more than unconnected bits of information and isolated skills—the kind of information and skills that multiple-choice tests are designed to measure. They need to learn to think deeply and critically. To analyze and dissect information. To apply knowledge creatively in order to meet the social, economic, and environmental challenges they'll face in the next century.

Classrooms where kids learn advanced thinking skills aren't of the neat-and-tidy variety. Instead, students mingle, share, collaborate. They work on projects, conduct experiments. Teachers confer with the class instead of declaim at the board. Often, there's noise and confusion. Real learning—the kind that leads to insight and understanding—is, after all, a noisy, confusing enterprise. Answers to real-life problems rarely can be plucked from a book.

The assessments that fit this new picture of learning are as active as the classroom itself. Instead of filling in bubbles with No. 2 pencils, students do things: compile portfolios, conduct experiments, write essays, give speeches, present reports. In contrast to the ease and economy of standardized multiple-choice tests, these new assessments are tough to score and expensive to conduct. But it's a price that schools around the Northwest and across the nation increasingly are willing to pay.

At the foot of Southeast Alaska's coast range, where massive Mendenhall Glacier hangs like an ice-blue pendant, the Juneau Borough School District is a leader in innovative assessment. Eight years ago, when the district's primary teachers and a few administrators launched a portfolio assessment project, they were explorers in uncharted waters. They have encountered resistance and dissension along the way. But the success of their journey shows up in hundreds of bright-yellow folders where kids document their progress and reflect on their learning.

Aaron Katzeek, a student at Harborview Elementary School in Juneau, Alaska, writes a letter to himself reviewing his strengths in language arts.
Photo by Peter Metcalfe

Bernie Sorenson of the Juneau central office sees a strong connection between current learning theory, Alaska Native cultures, and Juneau's portfolio project. Brain-theory research shows that humans learn best those things that are meaningful, useful, and relevant. The Tlingits and other groups native to the region built their culture, art, and lore around those very principles. Portfolios, Sorenson says, take learning back to those fundamentals. For it is where classroom experiences connect to their lives that students find meaning. And it is in making meaning that students truly learn, researchers say.

Dr. Judith Arter of NWREL and her colleagues in the regional lab network, writing in a recent "toolkit" of assessment resources, say that the current education reform movement "is fueled by research in education and psychology which supports a changing view of how learning occurs.

"In this new perspective," Arter and her colleagues argue, "the learner actively constructs personal meaning from information and experiences by linking new information with his or her preexisting knowledge and understanding. This 'constructive' learning process requires changes in the interactions between teachers and students in the classroom—for example, more self-reflection, group collaboration, and teacher as facilitator."

In their 1994 publication *Old Beliefs About Measurement-Driven Reform: The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same*, researchers Audrey Noble and Mary Lee Smith write: "The cognitive-constructivist view of psychology and pedagogy aligns with a mode of assessment known as performance or alternative. It rejects as inappropriate the sole use of traditional multiple-choice items that test isolated bits of knowledge and skills.

Changes in instruction bring changes in assessment. "Cognitive-constructivists," they say, "see performance tests as a form of testing that parallels their view of how pupils learn and should be taught."

In multiple-choice tests, students pick an answer. In performance tests, students create an answer. In a May 1992 article in *Educational Leadership*, Grant Wiggins, research director of the Center on Learning, Assessment, and School Structure, offers examples of what he terms "authentic" assessments—so called because they mimic tasks real people face on the job or in civic life. A student might, for example, be asked to simulate these roles:

- Psychologist/sociologist: Conduct surveys, perform statistical analyses, graph results, write newspaper articles on the meaning of the results
- Archaeologist: Determine the culture or time frame of a mystery artifact or person
- Newspaper editor and writer: Write articles and editorials set in the studied historical time
- Policy analyst: Predict the future of a country
- Expert witness to Congress: Testify on behalf of or against advertising claims, regulation of children's TV, or a current policy issue

Not only do such tasks unleash kids' deep creative and cognitive powers, they also can spark their interest in ways that, say, memorizing the periodic table of elements or the preamble to the Constitution can't. Observes Wiggins: "Modern theories of teaching and learning demonstrate that students know, understand, and retain more when they learn it in the context of real-life situations. They can also demonstrate the depth of that understanding when the task they are asked to perform mirrors a real-life situation."

In his 1995 book, *A Portfolio Primer*, Geof Hewitt of Vermont quotes a superintendent who said this about multiple-choice tests: "Students hate them. Teachers hate them. Principals and school boards hate them, and parents and superintendents hate them. But ask a principal why her school uses multiple-choice tests and you'll hear, 'I dislike them, but the school board demands this kind of testing.' The school board says, 'It's the superintendent!' and the superintendent blames the parents."

Besides giving few clues to what kids actually can do, these much-maligned multiple-choice tests have weak ties to classroom practice. Written and scored by big, national testing companies, they tell District A how it ranks in comparison to District B, and they sort students on a bell curve. But because they are tests of general achievement and ability (some question their validity even in this area), and because scores come back weeks or even months after testing, standardized tests don't give teachers feedback that is quick enough or specific enough for altering practice to meet kids' needs.

The best assessments, experts say, are those that are themselves learning experiences. Ideally, learning and assessment are blended together so skillfully that they are indistinguishable. Arter and her colleagues describe the day-to-day melding of teaching and assessment, assessment and teaching, as a spiral that never ends—a "seamless web" in which assessment is woven invisibly into instruction.

Assessment, rather than being a goal post at the end of learning, should be the guidepost along the way. "Assessment drives the curriculum," Doug Archbald and Fred Newmann write in *Beyond Standardized Testing*. "It signals what counts. When we test for trivial or inauthentic achievement, teaching and learning are corrupted and 'teaching to the test' becomes a dirty word. But if we test for authentic forms of achievement, teaching to the test is appropriate and desirable....Tests, projects, and performances that demonstrate authentic academic achievement are valuable not only as assessment devices, but as guides to focus and inspire teaching."

is one big factor igniting performance assessment. The other is the standards movement. Educators at the local, state, and national levels, heeding the demands of citizens and politicians, are writing standards of mastery in every subject area. These standards—ranging, for example, from the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics goals to Washington state's Essential Learnings—provide clear and visible targets.

Assessments, in turn, are being designed to gauge whether students are reaching those targets. It's not good enough anymore, many education critics charge, for districts to demonstrate that School A scored higher than School B, or that Ashley scored higher than Heather on a standardized test. Because such rankings aren't anchored to anything solid, they don't really tell citizens and parents how well students and schools are performing.

"With the...discontent from employers and parents about the effectiveness of America's schools, the call for accountability information has been growing for more than a decade," Richard Jaeger and his colleagues write in a 1996 report from the National Center for Education Statistics, ***Technical Issues in Large-Scale Assessment***. "In fact, this widespread concern has contributed directly to the movement toward a standards-based education system, including assessments to monitor students' progress in attaining performance standards."

Around the country, a number of states are collaborating to develop and assess standards. The New Standards Project, a joint venture of the National Center on Education and the Economy and the University of Pittsburgh, involves districts and states with more than half the nation's student population. Participants are "devising tasks, inventing portfolio systems, and debating assessment measures in preparation for a national assessment system that highlights literacy, math, science, and other curriculum areas," according to Hewitt, who is one of the designers of Vermont's pioneering effort in portfolio assessment.

Another multi-state project, the State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards, has nine projects to develop innovative assessments. And an Urban School District Consortium launched by the American Federation of Teachers has pulled together a large number of members to develop performance assessments.

In the Northwest, Washington is in the midst of a massive effort to set standards and design assessments to match them. In 1993, the Legislature created a Commission on Student Learning and charged it with developing clear, challenging academic standards (the Essential Learnings) and finding better ways to measure schools' success in helping students meet those standards. The assessment system will have four major components: state-level assessments; classroom-based assessments; school and system context indicators; and staff development. Across the state, 16 professional development centers have been established, most of them managed by the nine Educational Service Districts. Dr. Richard Stiggins of the Assessment Training Institute calls Washington's initiative "probably the most notable effort in the nation right now" in the area of staff development for assessment.

J.B. Bouschor of Juneau reflects on his growth as a reader and writer. Photo by Peter Metcalfe.

And Oregon's Educational Act for the 21st Century, passed by the Legislature in 1991, requires students to earn certificates of mastery in order to graduate. Portfolios and structured work-related activities are part of the required assessment mix.

Arguably the most revolutionary and far-reaching aspect of the new assessments is students' changing role. No longer just passive test-takers, kids are becoming active self-assessors. They are devising rubrics and rating their own work. The teacher in Norman Rockwell's classroom never dreamed of asking her students what their idea of good writing was. She never challenged them to develop criteria for judging their work. She didn't say, "Now tell me how your essays have improved and how you might make them even better."

Geof Hewitt remembers how it was. "Miss Clough used to give me a C- and I had to guess whether there was a relationship between that grade and the number of red marks, scattered like measles, she'd incubated all over my pages. It was a guessing game, trying to psyche out what Miss Clough liked. And, worse, I played no role in offering an opinion."

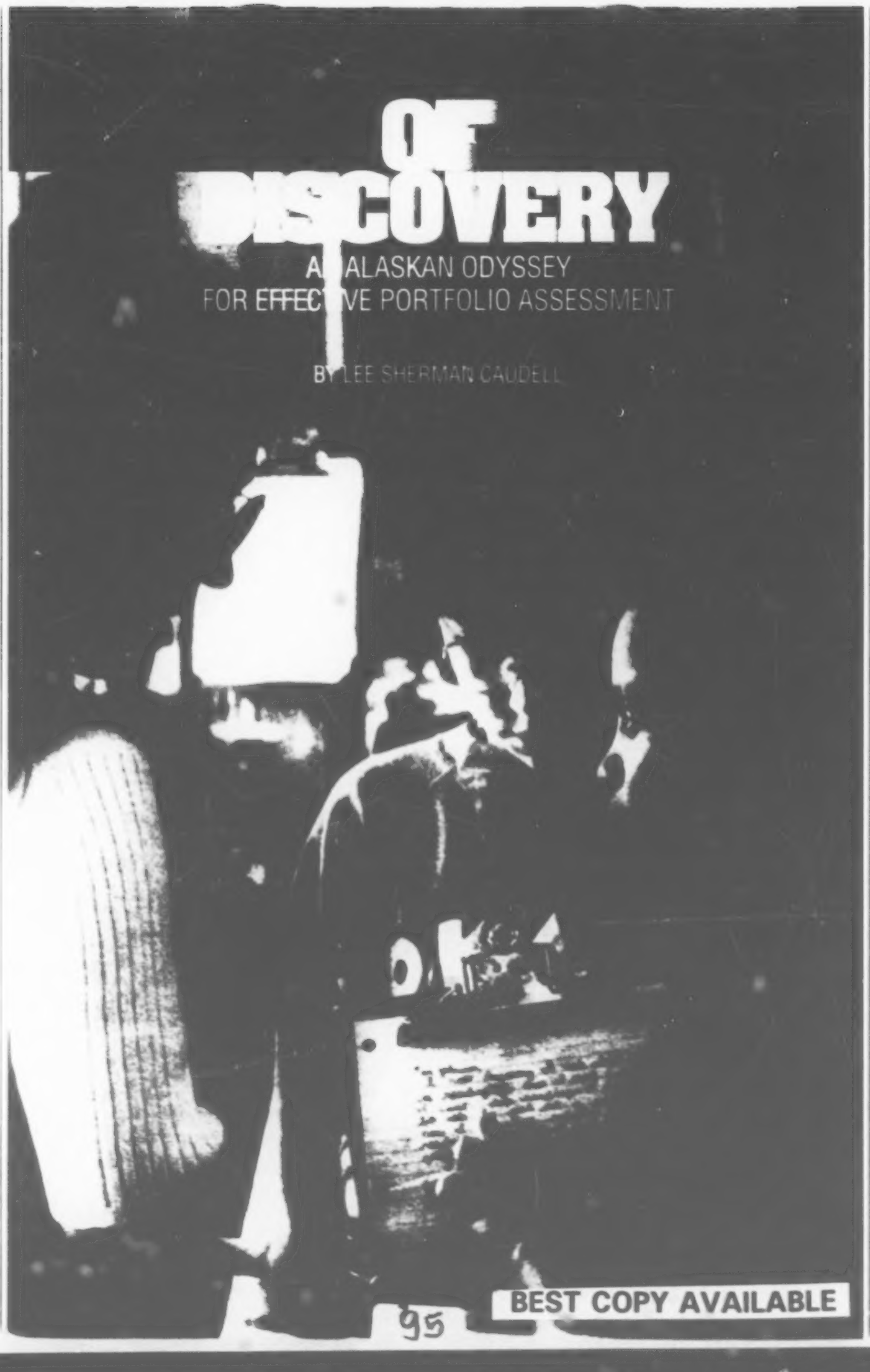
When kids are brought into the assessment loop (not left guessing what mysterious brew of ingredients Miss Clough stirred to produce a final grade), they can take charge of their learning. Assessment experts suggest that students should be fully versed in the standards they're expected to reach. But they go even further: Students should help choose and define the criteria against which they'll be measured. Finally, they should learn to judge their own work against those standards and criteria.

"When a teacher's responses indicate that she has all the knowledge and ownership of all the correct responses (and that there is only one for each situation) and that the student's job is simply to receive the knowledge, students do not learn to become reflective, to self-evaluate," write Francine Stayter and Peter Johnston in a 1990 publication, *Reading and Writing Together: New Perspectives for the Classroom*. "Being able to self-evaluate puts students in control of their own progress, which is central to becoming independent learners."

OF DISCOVERY

AN ALASKAN ODYSSEY FOR EFFECTIVE PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

BY LEE SHERMAN CAUDELL



PHOTOS BY PETER METCALFE

"I have gone from reading tiny 40-page books to reading 300-page books very rapidly. I like books with big and neat words so I can transfer those words to my own writing. I've changed as a writer in the area of word choice. I use high-tech and just plain fun words."

**—John Wagner, fifth-grader
Harborview Elementary School**

JUNEAU, Alaska— Shirley Campbell pulls a bright-yellow three-ring folder from a collection of identical yellow folders stashed in crates on the counter.

"Who knows what this is?" the teacher asks her mixed-age class of third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders.

"It's a portfolio," James pipes up.

"What's it for?" Campbell asks.

"It shows our progress," James volunteers.

"Who's your audience? Who looks at it?"

Answers pop up around the room: "Teachers." "Parents." "Yourself."

"What does it mean to self-reflect?" the teacher asks.

"Kind of looking back," Rachel answers.

"What are you looking back at?" Campbell probes.

Students call out: "What you did, what you thought." "What you learned." "What you accomplished."

"Would you reflect on what you could learn to do better?" the teacher asks.

"Yes!" a chorus of voices responds.

The teacher explains their assignment: to write letters to themselves about their growth and progress as readers and writers. What do they most like to read? What discoveries have they made about their reading and writing? How have they changed? What is easy? What is hard? How could they do better?

The kids spread out with their paper and pencils, plopping into beanbag chairs, sprawling across the floor, propping elbows on worktables. Jacob writes that he likes sports stories, fantasies, and mysteries, and that he's getting "pretty good" at spelling six-letter words. Atlin says he can read "fluently" now, though he was "struggling" in fourth grade. Frankie liked *Dead Man in Indian Creek* and *Escape from Warsaw*. Rachel favors characters with "lively personalities." Sam explains that reading is "very important" for tasks such as ordering "camping stuff" from magazines and landing jobs. "If you don't know how to read, you're out of luck," Sam observes. "But if you know how to read, you have a way better chance of getting the job."

It's no coincidence that this Harborview Elementary School classroom, where children reflect on their own learning and store those reflections in portfolios, is bursting with books. Shelf after shelf is crammed with fantasies and animal stories, mysteries and adventure stories, science books and dictionaries. As children finish their letters, they retire to corners and crannies cradling volumes such as *The Five Chinese Brothers*, *The Ghostmobile*, and *Thunder at Gettysburg*. The quiet is broken only by questions from students who are still writing. "How do you spell elongate?" asks John.

The room's abundant books reflect the Juneau Borough School District's switch to whole-language literacy instruction about eight years ago. Portfolios followed quickly behind, like the wake of a freighter plying Southeast Alaska's Gastineau Channel. Seeing a glaring mismatch between whole-language instruction and standardized assessment, the district's first-grade teachers began to look for a better fit between teaching and testing, says Bernie Sorenson, who coordinates grants and assessments for the district. A groundswell of dissatisfaction with traditional report cards, along with a growing discontent with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills as the district's main measure of student progress, launched the district on an eight-year odyssey to design and use portfolios in language arts assessment.

Today, every first- through fifth-grade teacher in the district's five elementary schools is required to compile—with student input—a language arts portfolio for each child in her classroom. Portfolio content must follow district guidelines. (See Page 11 for a list of required elements.) But eight years ago when portfolios surfaced in Juneau, the waters of alternative assessment were largely uncharted. "We've been sort of the entrepreneurs of portfolio assessment," says Sorenson. "It began with our primary teachers looking at standardized tests and saying, 'Is this developmentally appropriate? Isn't there another way?'"

■

"I have changed in my ability to stop at periods, pause at commas, and understand the books better. What makes a good book for me is humor. I discovered that I can ignore people because I am so in the book. I have changed as a writer in my building suspense and my longer stories."

—Erin Cottingham, fourth-grader
Harborview Elementary School

Harborview Elementary School sits in the shadow of Mount Juneau, a muscular peak rising abruptly from the waterfront. Wedged between the icy waters of Gastineau Channel and the snow-crested cliffs of Southeast Alaska's coast range, Juneau has the scent of wildness. The spirits of bald eagles and brown bears, killer whales and king salmon—the wild things that inspired the arts and legends of the native Tlingit people—inhabit all the stirrings of the forest, undulations of the ocean, and scudding of the clouds.

The toughness and independence of Juneau's inhabitants are reflected in its schools. Grass-roots innovations are popular. Top-down mandates are not.

"It's the Alaskan spirit," says Mary Tonkovich, a reading and home-schooling specialist with the district office. "Nobody tells us what to do. Our staff is the wild, raging river, not the stagnant pond."

Says Sorenson: "The people in this district are highly professional. Every article that comes out, they're sharing with everybody, they're reading, investigating, questioning. Pretty soon, this little swell gets started and they say, 'Let's go for it.'"

With grant money from the state education department, a group of Juneau first-grade teachers, a reading specialist, and the district curriculum director journeyed to Anchorage in 1989. There, they took workshops on portfolio assessment sponsored by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. They wanted an alternative to

standardized testing—the cookie-cutter method that too often fails to accurately measure what students know and can do. Portfolios, potentially rich with detail and packed with individualized information on each child, seemed to mesh with the district's new-found emphasis on literature-based literacy instruction, to which children bring their own meaning and experience.

The group's early enthusiasm flagged, says Tonkovich, as they began to slog through the task of designing a workable, meaningful system. The questions were many: What was the purpose of the portfolios? How should they be scored? How do they fit into the instructional mix? Where do they belong in the big picture of district, state, and national reform? What items should they contain? Who should select the contents? Who was the primary audience?

Answers were elusive. Portfolios were new on the school reform scene, and the district stumbled along, borrowing from the few models that existed and inventing the rest, says Tonkovich.

"What we have now is nothing like what we started with," she recounts. "We had focus groups of teachers, and they'd try things out and say, 'No, this doesn't work, or this is great.' The first couple of years, I had cardboard boxes *filled* with things from other places."

The teachers struggled to design instruments to chart student growth. They dipped into the research and sifted through their own experience, looking for benchmarks of progress in reading and writing.

They found what they were looking for: clues to better assessment. But, like fishers who unexpectedly find king salmon among the rockfish in their net, the Juneau group landed a bonus: clues to better teaching. As one result of their search, they developed two continuums—one for reading, one for writing—where teachers could chart the development of primary students.

The continuums pinpoint the skills, comprehension, and attitudes students exhibit at five levels of proficiency: emergent, beginning, developing, expanding, and independent. An emergent reader, for example, relies on memory for reading, focuses on pictures rather than print for meaning, understands how books work (reading from top to bottom, front to back), and shows curiosity about print in her environment, among other things. On the other end of the continuum, an independent reader reads books with long descriptions and challenging vocabulary, remembers the sequence of events, connects experiences with reading, corrects herself automatically, confidently reads a story with appropriate expression, reads silently for extended periods of time, and recommends books to others.

More than just charting student performance, the continuums also offer guideposts for teaching.

"They provide the best training for teachers," Tonkovich says. "In developing and using the continuums, some good teachers have become very excellent teachers by really thinking about the processes of learning to read and write."

Adds Bernie Sorenson: "It's so key that teachers know the targets—for example, what does a good reader look like? Then their daily practice can mirror those targets in order to get those kids to those levels."

Ultimately, the continuums gave Juneau's teachers the elusive link between curriculum and assessment. "People say, 'Well sure, it's intuitively obvious that you tie the curriculum and the assessment together,' but that isn't the way it works in real life," Tonkovich notes. "The continuums just brought that together so much for so many of our teachers."

Sorenson describes the primary teachers' early struggles to design the continuums. "There was a lot of blood, sweat, and tears—observing kids, writing it up, coming back to each other and saying, 'Is this what we're observing as an emergent reader and writer?' These people gained an incredible ownership of the process. They grew. They were observing, trying to figure this continuum out. All of this was changing practice."

Still, using the continuums consistently across schools and classrooms proved problematic. Teachers found, for example, that they sometimes placed students at very different points along the scale. "A teacher would say, I marked the child an independent reader, but the teacher before says he's an emergent reader," says reading specialist Susan Hanson. To help ensure inter-rater reliability—consistency from teacher to teacher—the portfolio designers put together a list of "benchmark books" that represent what a child can do at certain points. Beginning readers, for example, can handle such books as *Plop!*, *Too Big for Me*, and *Ten Little Bears*. Independent readers can conquer titles like *Loose Laces*, *Abracadabra*, and *Uncle Elephant*. Teachers also are encouraged to work in teams and share strategies so that portfolios look alike from classroom to classroom.

Another piece of the portfolio mix—teacher narratives—changed practice, too. Two quarters each year, teachers meet personally with parents. On alternate quarters, teachers write about students' language arts achievement and file the narratives in the yellow portfolios. Knowing that they must describe the details of students' progress sharpens teachers' observations and deepens their understanding of each child's growth, says Hanson.

"During the whole quarter, I take more notes, thinking ahead to when I will write my narrative," she says. "I want to make sure I'm not inventing things. Writing is

Juneau Language Arts Portfolio

Every student portfolio must contain the original copies of the following items:

1. Student Reflection Letter (one per year, fourth quarter)

Student writes or dictates letter to reader of portfolio, explaining why certain pieces were selected, and/or thoughts on how he or she feels about himself or herself as a learner.

2. Reading Continuum (two per year, first and fourth quarters)

Reading Samples (two per year)

- Reading continuum will be completed each semester by recording child's level on the continuum at the end of first and fourth quarters with an X and the date on the spot that best reflects the child's current level of performance, based on all data and observations during the semester. Marks should be made on all three lines of the continuum (comprehension, skills and knowledge, attitude).
- Two dated reading samples will be included in final portfolio. These could include copies of free reading choices and instructional material. (Use the reading stamp to indicate if it is guided reading, etc.) The final, fourth-quarter sample should contain a running record done by the teacher reading with the student.

3. Reading Attitude Survey (one per year, in fall)

(Though optional, teachers are strongly encouraged to include)

- Student may be interviewed by teacher, older student, specialist, volunteer, or aide.
- The reading attitude continuum may be a useful conference tool (only for teachers in their planning to share survey information).

4. Writing Continuum (two per year, first and fourth quarters)

Writing Samples (one per quarter)

- Continuum should be marked with an X and dated to reflect child's current level of performance, based on all writing done during the semester.
- Samples during second and fourth quarter: Child- or teacher-selected sample should accompany the writing continuum.
- Out of the four samples, at least one is teacher-selected and at least one is child-selected for second-graders. The other two should be scored, distinct writing assessment samples.

5. Written Teacher Narrative (two per year; others optional)

Teacher generates narrative about each student's performance and progress in reading, writing, listening, speaking, literacy interests, and suggestions for parents.

6. Speaking/Listening (one per year, third quarter)

Observed behaviors should be dated. They may also be highlighted for easy discussion.

In addition, teachers are encouraged to include:

Favorite Pieces

Chosen by students for their portfolio. Students should write or dictate why the particular piece has been included.

Other teacher anecdotal observations

Teacher regularly records evidence of growth and development and/or difficulties that the student faces.

Oral language cassette tapes (including sound entries on disk)

Student selects a story, a poem, a set of directions, or an event to record orally on audiotape or on the computer. The continuum of speaking behaviors is a useful tool for analyzing and evaluating the tape.

Developmental Spelling Lists

Reading Logs

Record of books read by student [illegible]

Drawings/illustrations, especially those that accompany texts.

Math journals, in grades three and above.

Source: [illegible]

thinking, so as you're writing, you're really thinking about that child, and you find out things you didn't even know about her based on the data you collected."

Some teachers address the narrative to the student. Last year, one teacher wrote in part:

Dear Ryan,

Your reading has shown much improvement. You're beginning to read with more expression. I'm pleased with your efforts. You've done a better job of choosing books and using your silent time effectively. Your abilities will continue to grow if you keep up the effort. You're gaining skill in decoding new and unfamiliar words. You didn't let mistakes stop you, even when the task was hard.

The narratives and continuums have replaced traditional report cards in language arts in first and second grades. As teachers moved away from the old skills-based curriculum with heavy reliance on basal readers, phonics, and worksheets into a meaning-based curriculum built on literature and wholistic strategies, assigning letter grades began to feel like wearing an old pair of shoes with a new suit.

"If we just had a straight report card—A, B, C grades on whether students could read short or long vowels or whether they were on grade level—we could still be teaching the old way and not using the current language research," says Suzie Cary, Principal of Harborview Elementary School.

Sorenson echoes those sentiments: "What we had before was a comparison thing—are you on grade level or not? Are you on this basal reader or not? A report card says you got an A—an A for what? Because you smiled a lot? Because you finished the assignments? Because you showed up every day?"

As a whole, the portfolios are not scored. But marking the continuums and writing narratives takes time—the "t" word that is cause for constant lamentation in K-12 education.

"The narratives take at least 20 to 30 minutes per child," says Susan Hanson, the reading specialist who works with Title I students at Glacier Valley Elementary School. "You can *do* it in five or 10 minutes, but you get so carried away when you're sitting there writing about that child that you take longer. Before you know it, it's 11 or 12 at night, and the next day you're angry because you're so tired, and you think, 'What is this portfolio process?'"

Just managing the piles of paper that mount up in the portfolios can crowd teachers' schedules. District people tell stories of weary teachers standing at the copy machine duplicating portfolio pages for parents and wielding three-hole punches for hours on end as they compile the portfolios that will travel with the child from one grade level to another, year after year.

To address the time problem, the district has secured grants from government and private foundations to give teachers two extra days for writing and managing the portfolios. It also has invested heavily in technology. Every K-8 teacher now has a Macintosh at her desk, where she can write and store her narratives efficiently.

Despite these central-office efforts to ease the burden, the "t" word still comes up consistently as the biggest drawback of portfolios.

"We don't *want* our teachers to have to do it on the evenings and weekends," says Principal Cary. "But we haven't been able to get away from the teacher-intensive time involved."

■

"I see myself as a writer: stronger, wiser, energetic, and yet still young in the ways of words. I see myself as a mathematician: more capable in doing math equations, stronger in problem-solving, and wiser in the ways of math. I see myself as a history student: open-minded, information sucker and information seeker. I've found that this world has gone through a lot of changes, and it is our duty to study them and learn from their mistakes."

—Peter Moore, freshman
Phoenix program
Juneau Douglas High School

When Harborview teacher Shirley Campbell held up a yellow portfolio and asked, "Who's the audience for this?" one student answered, "Teachers." Another said, "Parents." A third said, "Yourself." To each answer, she nodded assent, for all were correct. In the future, the list might include the district central office, the state education agency, the federal education department, and elected officials at every level. The goal, says Sorenson, is to link at least some pieces of the portfolio to district goals, state standards, federal mandates, and public accountability—a vision that is "much more global."

Clear and Visible Targets

[illegible] strategies help kids aim straight

When Juneau students take exams, write papers, or do projects, they don't have to aim blindly for excellence. They don't have to read the teacher's mind. Or hope they studied the right material. Or wonder whether their work is in the A, B, or C bracket. That's because the Southeast Alaska district gives kids clear and visible targets. Students know in advance what qualities will earn high marks—and what deficiencies will ensure low ones. And, as everyone knows, it's a lot easier to hit a target when you can see it.

"We are making kids abundantly aware of our goals and our standards—and where the kids are in relation to those goals and standards," says Bernie Sorenson, who coordinates grants and assessments in the Juneau Borough School District [illegible] teachers who are using strategies such as self-reflection and [illegible]—things [illegible] [illegible].

[illegible] Chad Dalton, The Juneau [illegible] High School senior decided to organize his year-end portfolio around Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Skills. His classmate Pat Race took a different tack. For his portfolio, Race created an online multimedia presentation featuring a 3-D piston rotating in space to the theme of *Mission Impossible*; an animated movie featuring fish swimming through light and shadow; and a math project set to The Beatles' 1960s hit song *Revolution*. He stored his presentation on a CD-ROM. Freshman Sarah Aronson expresses pride that her online portfolio [illegible] essays on Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* and on the bombing of Hiroshima. "It's hard for me to voice my opinion," Sarah concludes.

These students participate voluntarily in the high school's two-year-old interdisciplinary program, Phoenix. With an emphasis on using advanced computer technology for project-based learning, Phoenix steers kids toward meeting state and national standards by making them visible and showing how they connect with every assignment. Classroom walls bear copies of the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics standards along with state standards in English, history, science, and technology. In technology, for example, Alaska's performance standards say students should:

- Use [illegible] tools
- [illegible] evaluate, and manipulate the breadth of information [illegible] and use technology to [illegible] and select information in all areas
- Be able to apply a variety of technologies to explore ideas, solve problems, and construct meaning
- Use technology to express ideas and exchange information
- Understand and evaluate the impact of technology on individuals and society

"We're teaching to the standards rather than going by a curriculum in a textbook," says Sue Zimmerman, a Phoenix program founder. "We tell the kids, 'You're doing this because you're meeting this standard in English and this standard in social studies,' so that the kids understand why they're doing what they're doing."

The portfolios, Zimmerman says, "are geared toward showing parents and showing the kids themselves how they have met the standards to graduate from high school in Juneau." The portfolio must give examples of how the student met the standards in all subjects. It also must answer the question, How did your work this year demonstrate your skills as a communicator, a problem-solver, a reasoner, a connector, and a risk-taker?

The Phoenix portfolio replaces the old parent-teacher conference. Students present their portfolios to their moms and dads. The teacher remains in the background and gets involved only if the student asks her to join in. To rehearse their presentations, the high schoolers hook up with third-graders from neighboring Harborview Elementary School. The big kids present their portfolios to the little kids, and vice versa.

"Our purpose in doing [illegible]," says Zimmerman, "is [illegible] kids reflect for themselves and be able to say to their parents how they have grown as learners this year. They come up with these remarkable insights on themselves."

In a letter to his parents introducing his portfolio, for example, freshman Peter Moore wrote this: *Compromising for me has been about the toughest thing to sustain and contribute. Compromising has more frequently come up, and has mostly been seen in project periods. The fact that everybody has semi-different ideas about how things should be done.*

it often comes to compromising to solve the problem. You both know me, and know that I have good ideas and a creative mind, and it is sometimes hard for me to listen to other people's ideas. Even though compromising is a part of everyday life and is something I'm good at, there are still things I need to work on."

Phoenix teachers create scoring guidelines called "rubrics" for all student projects. As used in classroom assessment, the term rubric refers to a grid that contains the criteria for achieving a certain score on a project or an assignment. Phoenix students may earn one of three scores: an E for "exceeding the standard," an M for "meeting the standard," or an IP for being "in progress." One group project, for example, required students to create a "cultural structure" representing the group's answer to the question, "Who has the right to the Holy Land?" To get an E, the group had to, among other things, include a detailed floor plan; explain how elements of the structure represent the ethos of the relevant cultural groups; discuss the structure with clarity; and give examples of how the group integrated technology, history, math, and English into the project.

The Phoenix approach, stressing real-world applications of knowledge, is designed for a technology-rich, information-glutted planet. "Nowadays, there's just so much technology and so much information in the world, we cannot fill students up with information," says Zimmerman. "So we have to teach them how to make choices and reflect on their own."

Down the road at Dzantik'i Heeni Middle School, eighth-graders are testing their skill, knowledge, and ingenuity through such self-initiated projects as tanning a bear hide, building a hot tub, staging a mock trial, swimming the Gastineau Channel, and attending a veterinary surgery. Students work with a community "coach" to plan and execute their rite-of-passage experiences, ROPES. They make oral presentations to three-person community panels, as well as to classmates. Students' reflective essays on their projects are scored from a rubric.

Like Phoenix, this front-of-the-pack program exemplifies Juneau's commitment to taking the mystery out of assessment. One of three "houses"—schools within the school—the ROPES house mirrors the Phoenix program's emphasis on self-directed learning and alternative assessment practices. As they are in Phoenix, rubrics are standard practice in this house of Dzantik'i Heeni (the school's name means "flounder river" in the language of the native Tlingit people). The house's seven teachers have established master rubrics spelling out the criteria for earning E, M, and IP in content, work habits, and communication so that as the house's 240 students move from project to project, teachers aren't "all over the map," says Parson. Students who show E quality in work habits, for example, support others in staying on task, are highly focused, double-check due dates, use personal checklists, maintain extra supplies, prepare for the unexpected, finish early, and demonstrate leadership. On the other hand, students who show behavior suggesting they are distracted, disorganized, forgetful, short-sighted, passive, and tardy will receive an IP.

The rubrics for individual projects contain only a "smattering" of the behaviors contained in the master rubrics so that students can focus their efforts, the teachers say.

"We don't try to assess everything at once, but try to focus just on the things we think are really important," says science teacher Paula Savikko. "We tell the kids, 'These are the behaviors we expect, these are the behaviors we're looking for.' It's a place to state our expectations very clearly. It's a system of feedback, and it's very specific."

Unlike the traditional D or F, which acted as brick walls to halt effort, an IP lets the student try again. "We don't allow them to give up," says Lopez. "One of the neat things about 'in progress' is that it's not a one-shot deal. We're not going to give up on you. We expect you to move along further than this."

While the house requires a portfolio from students, "right now it's an anthology—a collection of student work to present to parents," says English teacher Gail Parson. "They're not used diagnostically. We're still talking about how to focus this in terms of its purpose."

The house hasn't abandoned traditional grades. But the rubrics provide a different avenue for getting to those grades. Students whose work earns about half Ms and half IPs get a C. Students who earn mostly Ms get a B. If at least one-third of their scores are Es, they get an A.

"It's too big a battle to let go of the A, B, C stuff altogether," Parson acknowledges. "We have one foot in both worlds."

But Sorenson cautions against using portfolios for inappropriate purposes or contradictory goals. "Is our purpose," she asks, "to help kids understand themselves as learners, knowing who they are and where they've been, pulling their story together? That purpose looks very different from using the portfolio to show us that Johnnie is reaching the district goals."

Audience and purpose are the nagging questions that vex Juneau's portfolio proponents. "We've had thousands of discussions on who is the audience and what is the purpose," says Cary. "We still discuss that every time we meet. The answer is, 'It depends.'"

Juneau's portfolios are far from being random collections of "stuff"—one of the biggest pitfalls that assessment researchers warn against. Still, their purpose is a mixed bag. They celebrate each child's growth at the same time they measure grade-level and district progress. For example:

- The continuums and narratives are aimed at giving parents a rich, vivid picture of their child's learning.
- Data from the continuums can answer federal performance mandates for programs such as Title I.
- Combined data from the continuums goes into district charts and graphs showing how kids as a whole are doing.
- The continuum data are broken down by categories—gender or ethnic group, for example—and used to show their progress in relation to one another.
- Eventually, the district hopes to use the portfolios to meet state requirements; already, a statewide performance assessment in writing is folded into the portfolio.
- The portfolios travel from grade to grade as the child grows, serving as a conduit of information from teacher to teacher. (One teacher mystified a new student the first time she met him by saying, "Hi, Fred. I know you like to read mysteries." The boy's jaw dropped. Notes Sorenson: "Kids think teachers are magical, anyway.")

Among all the possible audiences, the students themselves are perhaps the most important. "Students can look back on their work at the end of the year and see how they've grown," says Cary. "At the primary level in writing, for example, that might mean scribbling and drawing pictures at the beginning of the year, writing sentences and paragraphs at the end."

As Sorenson sees it, portfolios put the "mom" into assessment. They focus attention on the incremental changes that parents see and celebrate as their children grow. "Portfolios are great evidence of 'Look where you are!'" she notes. "Who doesn't love to hear the stories that moms tell about 'When you were little, you used to….'?"

Kids take part in compiling their portfolios. They choose samples of schoolwork to include. Each year, they write an essay about the strides they've made as readers and writers. In some classes, students as young as first-graders lead parent conferences, presenting their portfolios page by page. (For more on student-led conferences, see Page 16.)

Self-reflection is the heart of the portfolio process and the key to its success. "The most important thing is for students to learn to look at their own learning, to take some ownership and responsibility for it, rather than turning it in and then it's the teacher's product," says Cary. "Out in the world, you have to be your own editor and critic."

See Voyage, Page 34

Culture Clash

Teachers want a "clean slate"

In the Juneau Borough School District, hundreds of bright-yellow folders bulging with classroom assignments, self-reflections, and teacher assessments tell the stories of children as learners. They're called portfolios, and every Juneau elementary student has one.

Every year, the yellow portfolio follows the child to his next classroom. The child's new teacher can mine the folder for useful information on her new kids. That's the district's intent, anyway. The problem is, most teachers don't look.

Time is a big factor. Portfolios can get lost in the September scramble. But there's a deeper reason. Across the district, from primary grades on up, educators say that an unwritten code in the profession prevents many teachers from delving into the records of students. Here is a sampling of comments:

"I think it's a great idea (to pass the portfolios along). But I don't think we've been real successful in convincing people that it's something to look at. Even before portfolios ever came about here, a lot of teachers would say, 'I never look at the cumulative record until the end of the year when I do my own.'

"Some teachers say, 'I don't unpack the portfolios until I need them.' Sometimes, they think the information is too messy, that they can find it better by going to the (previous) teacher and and saying, 'How well did this kid read?' rather than looking through all that paper. And sometimes the portfolios *are* poorly done and incomplete."

—Mary Tonkovich
Home-Schooling Specialist
Juneau Borough School District

"Teachers never go to the 'cum' (cumulative) files unless they have a bad kid that they want to know more about. There's something in the culture of teachers. As long as I can remember, teachers have taken pride in saying, 'I don't want to know the child's story because I want to judge him where he is.' That's what I hear. I remember saying that as a teacher: 'I don't want to hear you tell me Freddie's a bad kid or Freddie's a bad writer. I want to judge Freddie for myself.

"In my heart, I've been battling with why. Why don't we want to look? I think it's because we're not making the transition yet that the portfolios are developmental, not judgmental."

—Bernie Sorenson
Assessments Coordinator
Juneau Borough School District

"Teachers go to a lot of trouble to fill those (continuums and narratives) out and assess the kids and pass them on. But incoming teachers aren't sitting down and looking at them, saying, 'Oh, this is who this child is. Now I know how to diagnose and prescribe.'

"I think in the culture of the profession, the tradition is that you get a new crop of kids and you try to look at them as a clean slate. You don't go back and look at all their records. You take them where they are and you go."

—Gail Parson
Teacher
Dzantik'i Heeni Middle School

Caity's Conference

Kids Show Their Stuff at Student-Led Parent Conferences

By CATHERINE PAGLIN

WHEN ROBIN AND STEPHEN KILEY *met with their daughter's second-grade teacher in February to discuss her progress at Willamette Primary School, a fourth person was in the room: their daughter Caity. In fact, Caity did most of the talking. She read her parents the fable she'd written,* Cat and Dog Are Best Friends, *and explained the steps she'd taken—rough draft, peer editing, rewriting, and illustrating—to complete it. She demonstrated addition, subtraction, and early multiplication processes by coloring in squares on grid paper. She showed a graph she'd done of temperatures in cities around the country. She expressed pride in attaining goals she'd set earlier in the year—learning to read "chapter books" and keeping her desk more organized and her work neater.*

For Caity and her parents, who recently moved to Oregon's West Linn-Wilsonville School District from the Midwest, this was their first student-led parent conference, a schoolwide practice that starts in kindergarten. Student-led conferences are a natural outgrowth of the school's commitment to giving students "choices and voice" in classroom management and instruction, says Gail Aldridge, Willamette Primary's instructional coordinator.

"Night and day" is the way Robin Kiley describes the contrast between the traditional parent-teacher conferences she was used to and the student-directed conference. At Caity's former school, she says, conferences emphasized how students stacked up against each other and against grade-level norms. They stressed deficits instead of accomplishments. At Willamette, on the other hand, the conference was individualized, solution oriented, and informative.

"My daughter was very connected to her process and truly seemed to understand the work she had accomplished," says Robin Kiley. "We were amazed at how well she was able to describe her work. She was also able to self-critique."

Willamette's student-centered approach restored Caity's self-esteem after it had been beaten down at her other school, her mother says. "Her self-confidence about her learning ability has come back up," she relates. "She sees herself as a competent, capable student. The student-led conference had a lot to do with it."

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5
Cat And Dog Are Best Friends
SPOONER

Like the Kileys, many parents are discovering the advantages that student-led conferences have over the traditional parent-teacher model. For them, it's a time to find out what and how their child is learning. For students, it's an opportunity to reflect on and speak about their learning and to practice presentation skills. For teachers, it's a way to educate parents about the complexity of learning and to remove the aura of secrecy surrounding the assessment process.

"Student-led parent conferences may be the biggest breakthrough in communicating about student achievement in the last four decades," says Dr. Richard Stiggins, head of the Assessment Training Institute based in Portland. "The level of responsibility it brings to the student and the pride in accomplishment that can engender when they succeed is unprecedented."

At McLoughlin Middle School in Vancouver, Washington, parent Mary Sears and two other panelists—another parent and a district resource coordinator—listen as her seventh-grade son Jeff presents his portfolio. An earnest, gangly basketball player, wearing a new shirt for the occasion and sitting straight in his chair, Jeff speaks haltingly, choosing his words with care. With his teacher's coaching fresh in his mind, he is careful to use complete sentences and to avoid interrupting panelists when they ask a question.

"You seem so confident and not nervous," comments one of the panelists. "Is that true?"

"I'm as nervous as I could ever be," Jeff confesses.

Among the items in his portfolio are a children's book he wrote titled *What's Up?* ("What's up in the sky after it rains? A rainbow. What's up in a tree that chirps? A bird."); a drawing of an invention—self-cleaning gutters—for which he won a social studies prize; and a photograph of a model castle he and a friend spent more than 13 hours building at home. Handing the photograph across the table, he asks politely, "Would you like to look at it?"

He describes the requirements, processes, difficulties, and successes of the various projects.

After the conference, Jeff's smiling mother says she is surprised by her son's enthusiasm for his work and proud that he focused on his efforts rather than on grades and scores.

MCLOUGHLIN MIDDLE SCHOOL'S 1,100 sixth- though eighth-grade students are divided into six houses, two at each grade level. Each house has its own core teachers. Portfolios demonstrating students' achievement of Washington State's Essential Learnings are done schoolwide. Teachers in one seventh-grade house decided to require a student-led portfolio conference as well. It would be good preparation, they reasoned, for the Vancouver School District's mandatory research project and presentation for high school seniors.

Begun as a pilot project with 20 students, portfolio conferences expanded to one seventh-grade house two years ago. This year, the other seventh-grade house will make the switch. In addition, sixth-graders will give portfolio presentations to panels of eighth-graders—a dry run for the real conference they will lead in seventh-grade.

The seventh-graders present to their parents and two other panelists, who may be school staff members, district personnel, other parents, local business people, or other community members. Kathleen Wolfley, a seventh-grade language arts teacher and team leader, manages the logistics of recruiting panelists and scheduling the conferences, which take place eight at a time in the school's spacious media center.

To prepare for the conference, students role play and watch videotapes of previous conferences. They focus on speech, manners, posture, breathing, eye contact, appropriate vocabulary, and appearance. At the beginning of the year, many students hoped to transfer to the other seventh-grade house in order to avoid the presentation. But once the ordeal was over, says language arts teacher Carol Grammer, many pronounced it "easy."

In addition to giving students practice in presentation skills, the conference can be a powerful motivator, changing students' perception of education from something that's inflicted on them to something in which they actively partake, says Wolfley.

One seventh-grader acknowledged that the anticipated conference affected her behavior over the school year. "I was trying to do better and work harder so I'd have lots of stuff to show," she said after her presentation.

The conferences also increase the school's communication with parents in a way that reflects well on the school.

"This is the first level of education where the parents feel more excluded," says Grammer. Children at this age are pulling away from their parents, she notes. Because middle school coincides with the onset of adolescence, many parents blame the school for difficult changes in the child, she says.

Mary Sears, for instance, remembers that when she first toured McLoughlin, she was distressed to see some eighth-grade students kissing in the halls. She was reluctant to send her son there. Now, however, she is pleased with the school because she sees Jeff putting great effort into his work. And she far prefers the student-led conference to the traditional parent-teacher conferences. "This conveys what Jeff thinks and what he does," she says. "It brings their ideas more to you and how they think they're doing in school."

Observes Wolfley: "Often at this grade level, the only time we conference with parents is for negative reasons." The portfolio conferences, on the other hand, are an overwhelmingly positive experience for most students and parents.

"It's really important for parents to understand the good things we want for their children," says Grammer. She notes that every parent she has encountered has been very proud—and often very emotional—after the conference. "This experience does more communication than a million sent-home letters."

IN SUSANN SWANSON'S third-grade classroom, portfolios contain a form titled "Reflections About Me." On the form, a girl named Malia describes her growth in reading, writing, math, and work habits:

- "Now I read chapter books. At the beginning of third grade, I read picture books."
- "My writing has changed from print to cursive, but I still like to write in print."
- "My division and multiplication have improved a lot."
- "My work is better, but I'm slower."

"She knows herself," comments Swanson, who teaches at Mount Scott Elementary School in Oregon's North Clackamas School District.

The student-led parent conference is not something that can be merely substituted for the parent-teacher conference or used in a vacuum, experts warn. Instead, it must evolve naturally from instructional strategies that develop students' ability to continually reflect on and assess their own learning, that ask them to take responsibility for their learning, and that often involve them in constructing the criteria by which their work will be judged.

"This is not an easy idea to implement," says Stiggins. "It takes careful study and preparation, and an up-front investment in professional development."

Done poorly, student-led conferences can backfire, Stiggins cautions. For instance, if the conference is not truly a student-led event, it can become a forum for the parents and teacher to criticize the child in the child's presence. Or if a child is unprepared and inarticulate about his work, the parents may lose confidence in the school.

At Mount Scott, the student-led presentations emerged from several years of staff training, careful review of assessment options, and a restructuring grant from the Oregon Department of Education. Mount Scott was the first school in the district to use portfolios schoolwide. The staff wanted to make sure that portfolios were teacher facilitated, not teacher directed. A goal-setting conference in the fall and a student-led portfolio presentation in the spring are meant to get students engaged in their learning goals.

This year, the school will conduct its third year of schoolwide student-led portfolio celebrations. Over the next two years, Principal Douglas Miller expects the school to further strengthen the connection between the portfolios and the student-led conference.

Mount Scott's fall goal-setting process sets the stage for students' work during the year and for the student-led presentation in the spring. Goal setting varies from class to class. In Karen Utz's blended class, for instance, first- and second-graders choose one topic they want to study indepth that year. Topics range from waterfalls in the Columbia Gorge to race cars of the Indy 500 to poisonous Mexican frogs. The goal-setting conference clarifies the roles and responsibilities of parents, teacher, and student in researching the topic. Parents of the student researching waterfalls, for example, made a commitment to take a family outing to the Columbia Gorge to view the falls and gather information.

After spending much of the year learning the fine points of research and presentation, all the students do a report on castles for practice. Finally, they apply their skills to the topic they have chosen, producing a report and presenting their report to classmates.

Janice Woodlee's sixth-graders work with their parents to formulate two academic goals, such as learning fractions or reading a certain number of books during the quarter. They also choose one personal goal, such as becoming a better listener or being nicer to a sibling. Then students write a plan outlining how they will accomplish the goals and to whom they will go for help. Some students tape the goal statements on their desk. Goals are reviewed, reworked, and updated monthly. Students reflect in writing on whether they are meeting their goals. They then create plans to overcome problems, and set new goals if the old ones have been met.

At all grade levels, students are learning to set and meet goals, identify resources, reflect on their learning, create criteria, use criteria for looking at their work and that of others, and communicate about their work.

For student-led parent conferences to work, says Stiggins, it's essential that teachers be clear with students about what it takes to succeed. That way, the student can aptly describe that success to her parents. "If the teacher keeps all the secrets of where we're going, it's hard for the child to reflect at the end," says Swanson.

Such ability to reflect does not develop overnight. As with any-

See CONFERENCE, Page 35

A Way Wi

Intensive teacher training helps ensure staff and community buy-in to a new method of writing assessment

By MELISSA STEINEGER

It was not yet 8 a.m., but the parking lot sizzled under a July sun as Deborah Iwen hurried through the heat ripples and into the Kent School District headquarters. She squeezed in among 85 other teachers packed shoulder-to-shoulder in a stuffy training room. The heat would soon have them unbuttoning collars and fanning with whatever paper was at hand, but Iwen was so excited she hardly noticed.

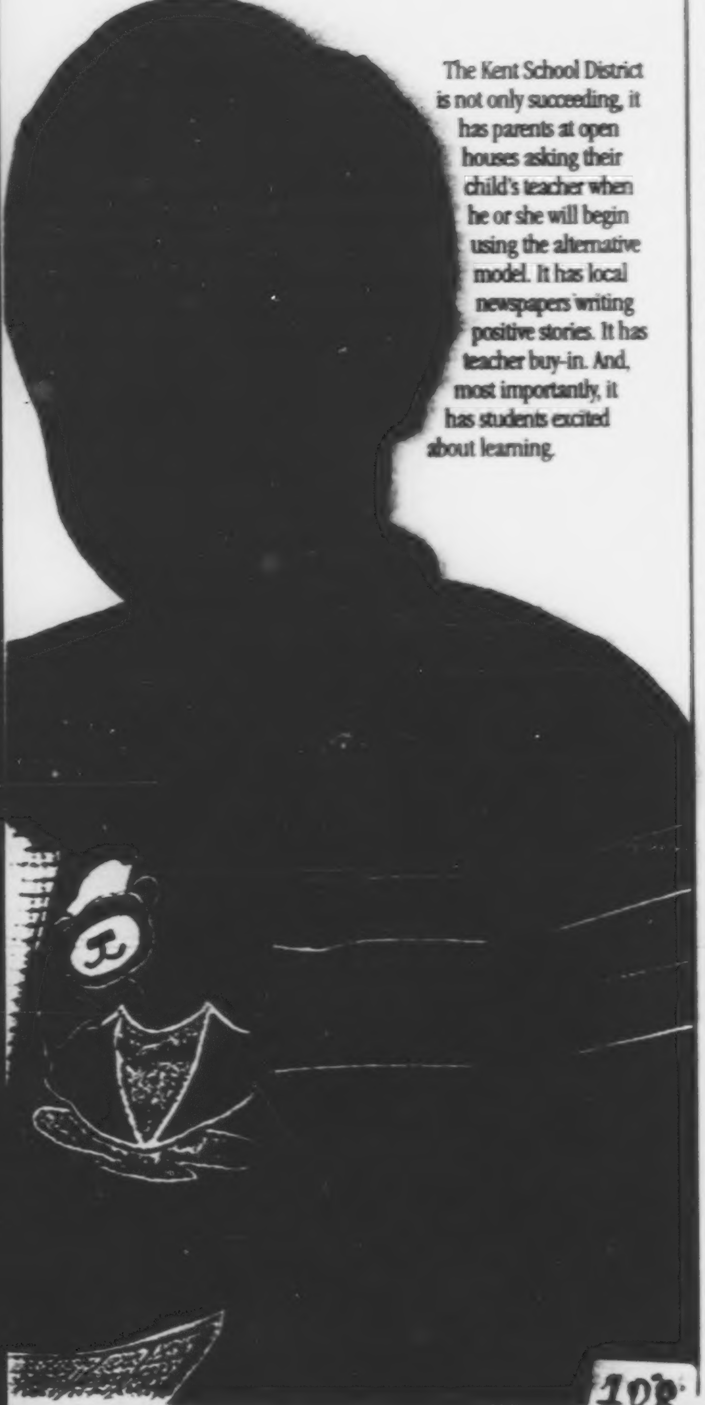
A published poet, member of an ongoing writing group, and regular supplicant before the blank page, Iwen had struggled for years to convey what she knew about writing to her sixth-grade students at Meadow Ridge Elementary. In the heat-soaked district office, she hoped to finally learn how.

For four days, the teachers lugged swelling notebooks of materials to lectures, small-group sessions, and hands-on activities. They looked through student samples. They worked with partners to learn how to consistently judge writing. They studied sample lessons. They threw themselves into the task and afterward wrote letters of thanks to the district for what they had experienced.

"I am a writer," says Iwen. "I understand the process of writing. I recognize good writing. But I couldn't figure out how to teach it—how to discuss writing in a way that leads to growth and improvement. After the training, everything fell into place."

Like committed teachers everywhere, Iwen yearns to ignite the passion for learning in her students. Increasingly, educators are realizing that alternative assessment—assessment methods that go beyond multiple choice or true/false—can help kindle that flame. Yet nationwide, many attempts to introduce alternative assessment at the classroom, district, or even state level have been rocky and controversial.

h Words



The Kent School District is not only succeeding, it has parents at open houses asking their child's teacher when he or she will begin using the alternative model. It has local newspapers writing positive stories. It has teacher buy-in. And, most importantly, it has students excited about learning.

Scattered among rolling green hills 20 miles southeast of Seattle, the 36 schools of the Kent School District echo with the voices of 24,000 youngsters. The fifth-largest school district in Washington, Kent employs 1,400 teachers with an average teaching experience of almost 13 years. The district has a long history of teacher training. For years, in-house experts and outside consultants have taught classes and workshops on the latest and greatest educational techniques to come down the pike.

"It used to be everything was a one-year focus," says Dr. Claudia Thompson, the district's Director of Instructional Services. "Collaborative learning, multiple intelligences—we'd done them all. But 10 hours of training doesn't make you an expert. What we see now is that it must be an ongoing focus."

Several forces helped change the district's outlook. A new superintendent launched a communitywide discussion of how the district could best serve its students. And Washington began developing requirements for statewide testing that would be based on alternative assessments.

Four years ago, the district followed up on the community discussion by developing a strategic plan. One goal was to improve student learning as measured by districtwide assessment. A committee of 33 teachers, parents, community members, school staff, and administrators developed a strategy to reach the goal.

The committee looked at all types of student assessment, from achievement testing to classroom assessments to portfolios. Initially, the meetings were simply to bring everyone to a common understanding about what types of assessment are being used successfully. They found that districts were all over the map: Some were developing their own open-ended math assessments, for example, while others were increasing standardized testing. And some were doing nothing at all.

As the committee talked and studied, members began to see the benefits of alternative assessment.

Maureen Curran, a teacher on special assignment, is helping coordinate staff development in alternative assessment. Curran retains the air of no-nonsense compassion that nurtures students. "For teachers," she says, "the kind of standardized testing that has traditionally been used is not useful. We don't know how to use the data to improve our teaching or increase our students' learning. If we can't use the data, the tests ultimately are not useful to the student."

Another key factor in the direction the committee took was Washington's movement toward alternative assessment in statewide testing. Although the state was still developing its plans as the committee moved forward, it became increasingly clear that the state tests would not only feature alternative assessment in writing, but also that all other state assessments, from math to social studies, would involve writing. [For more on Washington's statewide testing initiative, see Page 6.]

Early in its research, the committee sent a team to a workshop conducted by the Northwest Evaluation Association based in Tigard, Oregon. How to plan teacher training in alternative assessment was the theme of the workshop, held near the pastoral Oregon town of Silver Falls. The team spent 13-hour days learning from Allan Olson, Executive Director of the association, and from other teams from around the nation in various stages of implementing alternative assessments. "We were sharing information," recalls Curran, "bouncing ideas off each other, borrowing—you might say stealing—from each other. It was a great opportunity to explore possibilities and get feedback." The team returned home with a draft.

"It was crucial for us to go to Silver Falls," says Thompson, who was on the team. "As a district, you can't do this alone. It's too easy to get inbred in your thinking and not get a global perspective. One important point we heard over and over was that if you start with writing assessment, people get excited and understand what the possibilities are for other alternative assessments and for drawing students into the process."

Teacher interest was another reason the district adopted writing as the first area for alternative assessment. Teachers had been asking for training in writing instruction. Also, writing is used in every subject area, from business to music to shop. All teachers could find value for improved assessment methods and support the focus of district resources on writing.

In the fall of 1994, Kent began working extensively with the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory to create a program for training teachers in alternative writing assessment. The Laboratory offers workshops in Six-Trait Analytic Writing Assessment, a method of assessing writing that includes a clear focus on improving instruction. When the district announced the July workshop, so many teachers expressed interest that teachers had to apply for a spot. "We've never," says Thompson, "had to do that before."

Ruth Culham, Research Associate at NWREL, is familiar with the excitement that six-trait writing assessment generates. "I was a teacher for 20 years, and I've seen many techniques come and go," says Culham. "The six-trait model captures teachers' imaginations. It doesn't ask you to discard what works; it gives you a structure to build on those successful techniques."

The six traits—ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions—provide criteria to assess writing. Teachers learn to evaluate writing accurately, objectively, and consistently based on the six traits. The six-trait model also provides a way to teach writing. This was crucial to Kent because the district's goal was not improved testing; the goal was improved writing.

You would spot Stephanie Knipp among the sophomores in her classroom at Kentridge High School only because of her clothes. While her students wear the uniform of the day—baggy jeans, T-shirts, and sneakers—the youthful Knipp wears a simple flowered dress. Otherwise, you might mistake this third-year teacher for one of her students. Her energy and passion for teaching are as visible as the strand of pearls around her neck.

Last fall, as 22 students settled down for their first day of Knipp's honors composition, literature, and speech class, she asked them a simple question: How would you define good writing? Good writing, they quickly replied, is long-winded, neatly written, and full of big words that are spelled correctly.

Despite giving this disheartening definition, many of Knipp's honors students were good writers. But like many "natural" writers, they didn't know how they did what they did. Moreover, they had little understanding of how to make good writing even better.

Knipp could relate. She, too, had had difficulty in explaining why a student piece was "good" or "needs work." Like many teachers, she knew when writing was captivating, but didn't know how to convey that to students. What she'd found in the six-trait assessment workshop was not new information, she says, but a structure for what she already knew and a common language she could use with her students.

"The six traits taught me specific criteria for writing," says Knipp. "I give those criteria to students beforehand, and it helps improve the quality of their work. The students have a structure for evaluating writing—their writing and the writing of others. They can say a piece is dull because it lacks details. They can give concrete reasons why they think a piece is wonderful."

Those concrete criteria are especially important for teachers who must grade writing but who may not have an English focus or for those who, like most teachers, got little guidance in assessment while in college. Knipp's husband Jon, who teaches second- and third-graders, trained in language arts for elementary ages. But he had no training in how to assess writing before Kent offered the July workshop.

Excitement about the six-trait teaching and assessment model in the Kent district built after that initial July training in 1995. Many of the teachers who had taken the training gave two- to three-hour presentations to their colleagues during August school retreats. Curran gave a presentation to elementary principals. And as news of the new assessment model traveled, in Curran's words, "all heck broke loose."

Many of Kent's schools focused on writing for the year. Teachers who had gone through the July training offered 10-hour classes to colleagues in their buildings. Curran held a make-up class for teachers who missed the first ones. In all, almost two-thirds of the district's schools offered classes in six-trait writing assessment, and 600 teachers took the training. State professional development dollars were available to pay teachers to take the class.

The introductory class wasn't the end of training that first year. Teachers began informally sharing their experiences in using the assessment model. Curran organized a support group for teachers who had taken the July training and needed a place to share ideas and problems teaching the six traits.

In February, the district conducted a voluntary, districtwide pilot project in writing assessment using the six-trait model. Participating students in grades four through 12 worked on a writing sample for three consecutive days. A cadre of 50 volunteer teachers, parents, staff, administrators, and others rated the resulting 2,000 writing samples according to the six-trait model.

Dr. Steve Siera, Kent coordinator of research and assessment, said the experience was valuable in a variety of ways.

"Teachers said the scoring sessions clarified the six-trait assessment and helped them understand the value of the assessment model. Many said it was some of the best staff development on writing they could get."

One thing teachers discovered is that six-trait writing assessment is not necessarily more time-consuming than traditional methods. With any method, teachers must read the paper. But by defining a common language, six-trait assessment actually provides a kind of shorthand for comments: "organization," "voice," and the other traits convey common messages between teacher and student.

Parents and community members who rated the submissions also found the experience valuable. The local newspaper carried three stories on the pilot assessment project, including one by a district resident and parent who had helped with the rating (see the related article on Page 25). Parents and students were very eager to see the results. One teacher said her class of 11th-graders could hardly wait to see their scores. In the past, she typically had gotten a lukewarm response when she offered extra credit to students who took home a graded paper and brought it back with a parent's signature. Yet when she offered extra credit to students who took their assessment samples home for their parents to read and sign, almost every student returned with a signed paper.

The community involvement in rating the papers and the positive publicity encouraged the district to broaden its districtwide assessment for this year. All students in grades three, six, and nine will participate in a six-trait writing assessment. Kent hopes to encourage teachers of math, social studies, and other disciplines to be raters so they can also learn the six-trait system of assessment and teaching.

"Teachers in every discipline, from music to P.E., have kids write," notes Thompson. "Yet they typically don't know how to rate students on more than mechanics. Participating as a rater will give them the chance to learn the six-trait model."

"Some districts do a writing assessment and send out papers (to be scored elsewhere)," says Curran. "But you don't get the same impact on instruction because teachers have no idea what papers are being scored on. By having them do the scoring, they learn the model."

The next school year will see a continued focus on teacher training in six-trait writing assessment. Curran will repeat the class in applying the model for teachers who haven't taken it yet. In addition, a support group to allow teachers to share ideas and concerns with colleagues in other buildings is planned. And based on the success of the program, the district is revising its curriculum to include the six-trait writing model.

> "We were sharing information; bouncing ideas off each other, borrowing—you might say stealing—from each other. It was a great opportunity to explore possibilities and get feedback."

The walls in Joyce Minehan's sixth-grade classroom explode with yellows, aquas, purples, and blues. Orange banners across one wall proclaim the six traits of writing. Minehan, a 15-year teaching veteran, handles herself like a compassionate field commander in the war on ignorance. She yanks off the banner proclaiming "voice," strides to the front of the room, and slaps it on the wall directly behind her command post.

Today, she tells her 26 students, they will continue working on letters to the editor of the local newspaper about the positive points of Sunrise Elementary School. They have worked in teams to brainstorm ideas. They have organized lead paragraphs and body material. Now they will talk about how to give it voice.

Voice, she explains, sounds like the writer who wrote the piece. It makes readers feel an emotion as they read. It brings the topic to life.

Minehan reads example paragraphs from a novel the class has been reading. She asks students to describe how they feel as they hear the words. She asks what specific things make them feel that way. She reads generic paragraphs that students have helped her write to show no voice at all. "Sunrise Elementary has nice teachers," she reads. "They smile at students."

"Now let's hear what this might sound like if it were written with voice," Minehan says. "'Sunrise,'" she reads, "'has teachers who are truly caring. Once when I forgot to eat breakfast, my teacher gave me an apple from her sack lunch.'"

Students begin nodding and turn to their writing. Erin Verlander, 12, her blond bob bent over her carefully moving pencil, says: "It's definitely helped me with my own writing and in reading. I can recognize when an author is using the traits."

"I'd had professional development in portfolio assessments and other alternative assessments," Minehan says later, "but the training we had in the six-trait model was the longest, strongest professional development class I've taken. And having the monthly support group and district support was very important. I had never had a formal way to assess writing. Now my kids can use it themselves to assess their own writing and to understand where they could do better. It's a simple recipe for beginning writers, but it also expands to work for the most advanced writer."

SIX TRAITS OF GOOD WRITING

Most readers, writers, and teachers of writing tend to be moved by basic elements that have almost universal appeal. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory has defined these traits and developed the Analytical Trait Scoring Guide to provide a uniform, objective way to measure writing in each of the six areas. The basic traits are:

(1) Ideas. The heart of the message and the details which make that message vivid and engaging. The main theme and the details that enrich and develop that theme.

(2) Organization. The structure of the piece including a captivating and purposeful lead, strong transitions linking ideas, and a thoughtful conclusion.

(3) Voice. The personal tone and flavor of the piece, the writer's way of connecting to the audience, the sound of a real person talking.

(4) Word choice. Rich, colorful, precise language that communicates in a way that moves and enlightens the reader and creates a picture in the reader's mind.

(5) Sentence fluency. The rhythm and flow of word patterns; how a piece sounds when read aloud.

(6) Conventions. The mechanical correctness of the piece; the spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

In the six-trait training, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory provides detailed guidelines to rate each trait on a scale of one to five. One means a student is struggling, while five indicates a student can control the writing and knows how to fine-tune it. For example, a "one" in organization means the paper needs direction and is confusing. A "five" means the piece has a clear, compelling direction. The order and structure of the writing guide a reader through the piece and make the reader want to find out what happens next.

For information on training opportunities in the six-trait model, call Ann Marland at (503) [illegible].

Perhaps the worst myth about writing is that some people are born with a knack, and the rest aren't. Students who feel they aren't cringe when they face a blank page. Yet when writing is demystified and broken into manageable chunks, students see they can tackle it. And every child is able enough in one of the six traits to earn legitimate praise.

"I am seeing remarkable improvement in the work of many of my students," says Iwen, the poet and teacher. "I am not the only teacher enthused about this model, but the more I work with the six traits, the more passionate I feel about the potential this has for helping our children become strong writers. I feel like a disciple."

RESOURCE NOTES: NWREL has developed a guidebook on teaching and assessing beginning writers using the six-trait model and an annotated bibliography for using picture books for teaching writing. Seeing with New Eyes *and* Picture Books *are available by calling Linda Revels at (503) 275-9519.* ■

PARENT POWER

EDITOR'S NOTE: Two years ago, Washington's Kent School District began working with the Northwest Laboratory to develop alternative assessments to be used at both the classroom and district levels. Tackling writing assessment first, the district brought in Laboratory staff to train teachers, administrators, and community volunteers to use the six traits of effective writing (ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions) in scoring student work. Parent Tom Tomfohr, who took part in a March training and scoring workshop, shares his impressions. Tomfohr can be reached by phone at (206) 631-1945 or by e-mail at tomtomfohr@aol.com.

KENT, WASHINGTON—IN MARCH OF THIS YEAR I PARTICIPATED AS A VOLUNTEER in a writing assessment program developed by the Northwest Laboratory and sponsored by the Kent School District. Admittedly, my motives for participation were somewhat less than altruistic.

Last year I had the good fortune to retire from my position as marketing director for a medical equipment manufacturer at the age of 51. Two of my three daughters are graduates of Kent public schools. A third daughter is a second-grader, and I have a son in seventh grade, as well. With time on my hands, I felt it was about time to support a program that already had admirably prepared two daughters for college. Guilt is a powerful motivator.

With the guilt gear firmly in drive, I started volunteering my time at Grass Lake Elementary School, reading to kindergartners and third-graders, plus tutoring a few students individually. *Taxi Cab Dog* by Sal Barracca and *Airmail to the Moon* by Northwest writer and teacher Tom Birdseye are a couple of books that really turned the kindergartners on.

Much to my delight, I found the classroom experience rewarding. I've been approached more than once by six-year-old children tugging at their parent's sleeve, indicating, "There's the man who reads to us at school!"

IT WAS ABOUT THIS TIME THAT SANDY SCHMELLA, DIRECTOR OF THE READING AND WRITING PROGRAM AT GRASS LAKE, ASKED IF I WOULD BE INTERESTED IN ATTENDING AN EVALUATION WORKSHOP ON STUDENT WRITING. I'm not sure whether she felt that I needed help (I write a guest column for our local newspaper) or that I might be suited for the task. In any case, I said, "Yes." It's hard to turn down Sandy's requests, which are delivered with a sunny smile. Besides, I think she had tuned into my guilt channel.

So there I was two weeks later at the district offices, sitting amongst a group of about 50 teachers and a handful of volunteers. The first order of business: a review of the criteria used in the evaluation. Review?! Didn't anybody realize this was my first time through? However, after a few hours of skillful direction by the program leader and with the help of dedicated teachers, I was primed.

Our task was daunting: to read, reread, and appraise more than 3,000 papers submitted by selected classes in grades four through 12. The object was to evaluate each writer's ideas, voice, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, and grammatical conventions.

One of our responsibilities was to submit to arbitration discrepancies that occurred in the judgments made by two readers. I was not surprised but was somewhat intimidated when my friend Pat DeWitt, a fifth-grade teacher at Grass Lake, and I reached conflicting conclusions about one student's work. This particular essay was so grammatically flawed it was almost impossible to read. The way I saw it, the grime and dirt on the canvas hid the beauty of the colors beneath. Maybe it was because I am the world's worst speller. Maybe it was because those essays I submitted in high school and college suffered from grammatical troubles. I felt this essay deserved additional reward. With the help of a very adept interpretation by an assistant junior high principal, we came to a consensus. The composition deserved far more than the grammar alone would allow.

THIS IS THE BEAUTY OF THE PROGRAM. IT ALLOWS EVALUATORS TO LOOK AT ESSAYS THROUGH A PRISM. Judgments are not the property of the white light entering but reflect the multitude of departing colors.

The rewards of the program did not end here. As we sifted through endless papers, many touched on themes as routine as a quarter-pounder with fries. Others had us laughing, crying, and wishing we had 10, 30, 100 more pages to read. Then there were those that touched us with simple elegance and depth of understanding.

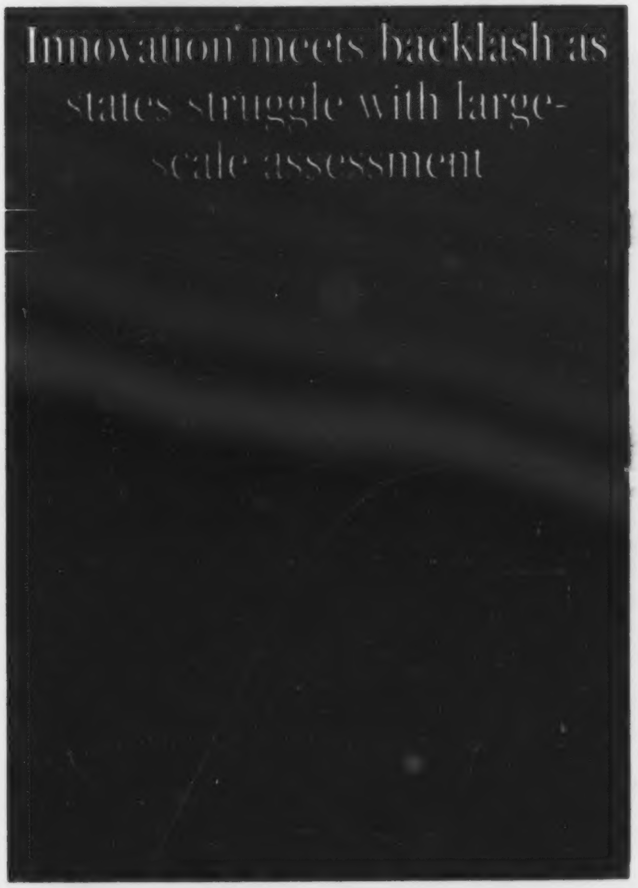
I particularly remember two essays with divergent yet related themes. The first was submitted by a recent immigrant from the Ukraine. Although grammatical conventions suffered and sentence fluency lacked, the writer's voice glowed. Her passionate, touching, and poignant description of the abandonment of grandparents, family, and friends left me numb in her grief. The tale of this girl's departure from homeland and embrace of a new country left me energized.

Then there was the telling essay of a young woman of Chinese ancestry. Her parents had immigrated to the United States as students, never to return home. The day came when the grandmother living in China died. With her grieving parents, the girl traveled to her ancestral homeland for the Buddhist funeral. Through most of the three-day ceremony, the writer remained cold and distant, unable to feel grief until confronted by a cousin she had never met. Finally, she opened her heart to the realization that her loss was the greatest. She had missed all that her grandmother had to give.

LIKE MY CHINESE AMERICAN FELLOW WRITER I, TOO, HAVE COME FULL CIRCLE. What began as an exercise in guilt reduction has become a renewed admiration for a school district and the educators who make this writing program work. This perceptive assessment program works because it draws upon the talent, dedication, and professionalism of our teachers. The license-plate frame on Grass Lake teacher David Staight's car offers a simple yet profound message: "I am a teacher. I touch the future."

HIGH STAKES

Innovation meets backlash as states struggle with large-scale assessment



SCORING MULTIPLE-CHOICE EXAMS IS A VISION OF LATE-20TH CENTURY EFFICIENCY: A quietly humming machine electronically reads the penciled-in bubbles and spits out answer sheets, neatly stacked, at a rate of 10,000 an hour. In contrast, scoring portfolios or essays is a messy, imprecise affair: Raters by the roomful sweat over raggedy piles of handwritten papers, looking for evidence of complex qualities such as "voice" or "purpose."

Ours is an age when personal computers and golden arches are the defining artifacts of culture. Yet many states across the nation are forsaking speed and economy in large-scale testing. Fast and cheap have their place, even in education. But policymakers and educators who want more than just a ranking and sorting of students—the information that standardized multiple-choice tests were designed to deliver—are turning to more cumbersome, labor-intensive strategies.

Requiring students to perform complex or open-ended tasks can tap rich veins of insight about what kids can really do. For example, can they use their powers of reasoning to defend a political viewpoint? Can they employ scientific method to solve an environmental problem? Can they apply mathematical principles to resolve an engineering dilemma? Can they incorporate writing traits to create a story that dances across the page?

Standardized tests are still the bread and butter of statewide assessment. But in all regions—north and south, liberal and conservative—alternative assessments have been added to the menu, if not as the main course, then at least as a side dish. While nearly 85 percent of states use traditional multiple-choice exams for statewide assessments, most of them combine multiple-choice with writing tasks, portfolios, or some other form of performance, according to a 1995 report from the Council of Chief State School Officers and the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. In *The Status of State Student Assessment Programs in the United States*, Linda Ann Bond and Edward Roeber report that in 1993-94, 38 states assessed writing, 25 states used other performance assessments, and seven states required portfolios. Two states—Kentucky and Maine—had abandoned multiple-choice altogether in favor of alternative assessment strategies.

In the Northwest, the same study reports, Montana and Washington were among only seven states nationwide that relied solely on standardized multiple-choice (see Page 6 for an update on Washington's comprehensive statewide standards and assessment initiative). Alaska, Idaho, and Oregon were supplementing standardized tests with statewide writing assessments.

But signs of backlash are everywhere. Recent headlines in *Education Week* and *Education Daily* declare:

- EDUCATORS WEIGH HIGH PRICE OF ASSESSMENT
- TEACHERS FOUND SKEPTICAL ABOUT REVAMPED TESTS
- STATE TEST QUESTIONS FOCUS OF RENEWED SCRUTINY
- STATES STRUGGLING TO ALIGN STANDARDS, ASSESSMENTS
- ASSESSMENT REFORM AT A CROSSROADS: A RETREAT FROM PERFORMANCE-BASED PRACTICE MAY SIGNAL THE RETURN TO FAILED FORMS OF TESTING

"Caution is increasingly the watchword, testing experts say," Millicent Lawton wrote on the front page of *Education Week* in January. She goes on to note that California and Arizona "recently dumped troubled statewide programs."

More than half the states that are designing alternatives to multiple-choice are encountering "major difficulties," according to Bond and Roeber. States' experiments with alternative assessment have faltered in three key areas: cost, purpose, and scoring.

PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENTS ARE EXPENSIVE. Researcher D.H. Monk estimated in 1993 that statewide performance assessments would cost between $35 and $70 per student. Standardized multiple-choice tests, in contrast, can cost as little as $1 or $2 per student. A recent study by the U.S. General Accounting Office predicted that a national multiple-choice achievement test would cost about $40 million, while a slightly longer test with short, performance-based questions would cost nearly $210 million.

"From a policy perspective, the major concern is whether the added cost of alternative assessment produces more meaningful results for parents and policymakers," observes an article in the Spring 1996 issue of the U.S. Education Department's online newsletter, *Improving America's Schools*. "Research has not yet explored this question."

The "meaningful results" states seek are clues to students' mastery of the complex skills missed by multiple-choice. It's the complexity of the desired findings—how well kids can think, create, analyze—that makes performance assessments costly. Those rooms full of raters must be trained to distinguish an adequate performance from an outstanding one. To do this, they compare each performance against a set of criteria laid out on a grid, usually called a scoring rubric. The technical quality of performance tests can hinge on how well raters understand the criteria and how consistently they apply them. Still, even if the scoring is reliable—different raters assign similar scores to the same performance—there's another key question that must be answered: Does the test really measure what it's supposed to measure? In other words, is it valid?

For performance assessments to succeed, the experts say, states must invest heavily in designing high-quality assessments and in training raters—usually teachers—to use the scoring criteria effectively. States that have rushed new assessments into schools or cut the training process short have run into criticism and opposition when the tests fail to produce valid, reliable results.

"Given problems in some of the assessment efforts first implemented—in Arizona, California, Georgia, and Maine, to name a few—policymakers pushed to set aside innovative approaches to assessment and to return to commercially available norm-referenced tests," write Bond and Roeber. "Although there have been some successes, such as in Maryland and Kentucky, the setbacks…elsewhere indicate that widespread acceptance of performance assessment is certainly not automatic."

Observes Dr. Richard Stiggins, director of the Portland-based Assessment Training Institute: "There have been a number of instances where states have tried to use performance assessments and portfolios in large-scale assessment and had it blow up on them because of a lack of quality. The problem associated with conducting good-quality, judgment-based assessment is that the criteria need to be clear. The other thing is that raters need to be systematically trained.

"At a school-building or classroom level," Stiggins continues, "that's relatively manageable. But at a statewide level, an awful lot of people have got to be involved. An awful lot of people have got to internalize this vision of a target and be trained to apply the criteria. I see few states, few large-scale assessment enterprises, willing to invest the resources it takes to do it well. It's a troubling paradox. It's just a whole lot cheaper to score multiple choice tests by machine than it is to train raters to be good judges of student achievement."

STATES WANT ASSESSMENT DATA FOR ALL KINDS OF REASONS. Often, those reasons clash. The most jarring conflict happens when states use the same assessment program to hold schools or students accountable on one hand and to improve instruction on the other, Bond and Roeber assert. To be useful as a tool for improving instruction, assessments should be flexible and ongoing. They should turn data around fast so that teachers can feed the information back into their practice, making continuous adjustments in instruction. Accountability, in contrast, calls for nearly the opposite qualities. Standardization, which ensures comparability and fairness, means that tests can't be tailored to fit schools' needs. Centralized scoring, which ensures the security and accuracy of scores, means that weeks or months go by before teachers see results.

"The primary goal of state assessment continues to be the improvement of instruction in order to help students meet new, challenging standards," write Bond and Roeber. "But states seem unsure whether improved assessment content and format or increased accountability will result in the most improvement. They therefore continue to do both, a situation that limits the utility of the assessment program for either purpose."

Most states use each of their assessment components for anywhere from two to five purposes, Bond and Roeber found in their national study. Improving instruction is the most common purpose (43 states), followed by school performance reporting (41 states). Other purposes include program evaluation (37 states), student diagnosis (26 states), high school graduation (17 states), and school accreditation (12 states). Stakes for schools are high—funding gains and losses, loss of accreditation, warnings, and eventual takeover of schools—in almost half the states.

"Caught between politics and science" is the way one policymaker, now an official in the Clinton administration, describes the status of current assessment initiatives. Science, represented by testing experts, cautions against using assessments as carrots and sticks to reward or punish teachers, schools, or students. These experts warn, too, against rushing ahead with new assessments before all the data are in.

Politics, on the other hand, calls for holding schools accountable—now. Lorraine McDonnell, who interviewed 34 state and national policymakers for a 1994 Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) study, found a consensus among respondents that said, in essence: "America can't wait for all the data to come in. Let's move ahead with new assessments and iron out the kinks as we go."

McDonnell found at least seven different types of purposes that policymakers expect assessments to serve: (1) providing information about the status of the educational system; (2) aiding in instructional decisions about individual students; (3) bringing greater curricular coherence to the system; (4) motivating students to perform better and parents to demand higher performances; (5) acting as a lever to change instructional content and strategies; (6) holding schools and educators accountable for student performance; and (7) certifying individual students as having attained specified levels of achievement or mastery.

"The sharpest disagreements between testing experts and the policy community have been over the policy uses of assessment," McDonnell asserts in her report, *Policymakers' Views of Student Assessment*. "Experts warn that if assessments are used to advance policy objectives, particularly if they involve the imposition of rewards and sanctions, negative consequences are likely to result. These may include widening the gap in educational opportunities available to different kinds of students, a narrowing of the content and skills taught, a centralization of educational decisionmaking, and the deprofessionalization of teachers."

Researchers have found that assessments can act as powerful "curricular magnets," pulling teachers' attention to the content of test items, report Audrey Noble and Mary Lee Smith in *Old Beliefs About Measurement-Driven Reform: The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same*, published by CRESST in 1994. They cite studies of statewide testing programs in Pennsylvania and Maryland where researchers found a direct relationship between what's at stake and what's taught. "The higher the stakes, the more likely narrowing of the curriculum will occur," the studies concluded.

For students, perhaps the highest-stakes assessments are those that serve as doorways to diplomas. Next year, Oregon will join the ranks of states that require students to pass competency exams for graduation. Such exams can run into legal challenges. Assessments that are used to award or withhold diplomas "are the ones most likely to end up in court," Bond and Roeber note. Courts have ruled that such assessments are proper only if they test what the school actually taught. That is, did the student have the opportunity to learn the skills and information she needed to pass the exam? Also important, the researchers say, are "the timing of the notice (students need to know approximately three years ahead of time that passing the exam will be a requirement for graduation), and the technical quality of the exam (the test must be reliable, valid, and fair)."

TECHNICAL QUALITY IS THE HOLY GRAIL OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT. One of the early pilgrims was Vermont, whose statewide portfolios in math and writing have succeeded in changing the way teachers teach. The state's efforts, nonetheless, have fallen short in scoring reliability.

To score portfolios and performances, raters draw upon their pool of knowledge and experience. They use their collective professional judgment. "Performance assessment scoring may be viewed as a social process in which a group of individuals negotiates meanings and comes to consensus about the interpretation of scoring rubrics," write Edward Haertel and Robert Linn in a 1996 publication from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Technical Issues in Large-Scale Assessment*.

Compared to choosing A, B, C, or "all of the above," this method of scoring looks soft and squishy. But, in the words of Geof Hewitt, one of the designers of Vermont's portfolio assessment system, "Reliable large-scale scoring is not a dream, but it takes patience and lots of training." He cites Oregon's statewide writing assessment as an example of scoring success. Some 400 teachers in 11 districts achieved inter-rater agreement levels about 95 percent of the time, he reports. The state then certified the scores by comparing them against pre-scored "anchor papers."

Even if states can devise a reliable scoring system, they face another trouble spot in performance assessments: generalizability. The question is, Does a student's performance on one task, or a few tasks, give an accurate reading of his overall ability? Researchers suggest that multiple tasks are

See HIGH STAKES, Page 35

In just the last few years, mounting interest in alternative forms of classroom assessment has generated hundreds of articles, books, monographs, videos, and CD-ROMs from educational laboratories, research centers, and publishers. *Northwest Education* offers the following products as a place to start—or a place to continue—a search for ideas and innovations to bring to the classroom.

A NORTHWEST SCHOOL IS ONE OF THREE SITES FEATURED IN *EYES ON THE CHILD: THREE PORTFOLIO STORIES* (Teachers College Press, New York, 1996), which gives readers an up-close look at how teachers are implementing alternative assessments in their classrooms. Author Kathe Jervis, a senior research associate at the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching, describes the portfolio strategies being used at Woodridge Elementary School in Washington's Bellevue School District, along with those of a Boston high school and an elementary school in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Each of the schools is involved in one of three major restructuring projects: Foxfire, the Coalition of Essential Schools, and Harvard's Project Zero.

"In this book, Kathe Jervis chronicles teachers' efforts to develop new strategies for looking at children's work and learning in three schools across the country—schools that are involved in radical restructuring of education in concert with reformers with the support of an interlocking network of courageous teachers," writes Linda Darling-Hammond in a foreword to the book. "In the course of the stories, she captures the dilemmas experienced by teachers working on the fault line between policy and practice at the time when a tectonic clash of paradigms is at work.

"The assessment strategies these teachers are inventing are 'authentic' in that they examine what students can do when they are engaged in real-world activities and the creation of their own ideas and products," she continues. "Rather than having students take multiple-choice tests in which they react to the questions and answers of others, student work and thinking are examined as they develop research, do science, read and discuss, build things, write in a variety of forms, pose questions, and wrestle with mathematical ideas."

The featured classrooms encompass single and combined-grade classes, regular and special education, individual and team teaching. Though the contexts are different and the approaches vary, the teachers in these cases share a commitment to grappling with assessment issues on behalf of their students.

Eyes on the Child is available for $19.95 (plus $2.50 for shipping) from Teachers College Press, (800) 575-6566.

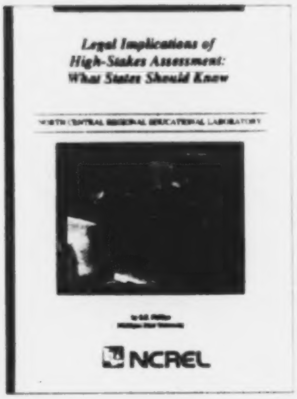
POLICYMAKERS, BUSINESS LEADERS, SCHOOL BOARDS, AND PARENTS are calling for schools to be accountable for student achievement, note Doug Archbald and Fred Newmann in *Beyond Standardized Testing: Assessing Authentic Achievement in the Secondary School* (National Association of Secondary School Principals, Reston, Virginia, 1988). This mounting pressure, they say, "has led to increased reliance on testing to monitor achievement, especially on competency tests and norm-referenced standardized tests developed beyond the classroom. At the same time, a number of authorities, from teachers to policymakers, have called for alternatives to standardized testing that might offer more informative and authentic indicators of the kinds of achievement schools ought to promote."

The book, published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, has three purposes:

- To offer a framework for thinking systematically and creatively about assessment
- To review the uses and limitations of standardized tests of general achievement
- To describe a variety of methods that may offer more helpful approaches to assessment

"All three are grounded in a broad perspective that calls attention to purposes of assessment, levels of assessment, and two critical issues: authenticity and multiple indicators," wrote Archbald, an assistant researcher at the Center for Policy Research in Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Newmann, director of the National Center on Effective Secondary Schools.

FOR EDUCATORS WHO WANT TO SHARE EXPERIENCES AND TRADE INSIGHTS on using portfolios for classroom assessment, there's an Internet discussion group on portfolios. The group was convened by Karen Jones Shiver, who teaches first- through third-graders in a combined, multiage setting in Kennewick, Washington. Shiver has been using portfolios as her primary means of assessment for several years. If you would like to participate in the online discussion group, contact Shiver at kjshiver@tenet.edu.



PROFESSOR SUSAN PHILLIPS OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY PROVIDES AN INDEPTH DISCUSSION OF THE LEGAL ISSUES STATES FACE when they design large-scale, high-stakes assessments.

In *Legal Implications of High-Stakes Assessment: What States Should Know*, Phillips covers four major areas of concern in statewide assessment:

- Testing to award diplomas
- Potential bias against historically disadvantaged groups
- Testing accommodations for people with disabilities
- Performance assessment issues

The handbook devotes a chapter to each of the four topics. Each chapter discusses relevant legal, measurement, and policy issues; provides an analysis of relevant statutes and case law; and makes recommendations for designing legally defensible assessments.

"The goal," writes Phillips, "is to give the reader a broad understanding of relevant legal arguments, what the courts have required in prior cases, and what one might expect from a current legal challenge."

The book is directed at legislators, lobbyists, state education agencies, school boards, administrators, and other policymakers involved in assessment enterprises. A glossary defines legal and technical terms.

"An understanding of the legal principles involved is vital to compliance with relevant statutes and case law," Phillips writes. "The inevitable gray areas and issues that have not been fully litigated require policymakers to 'read between the lines' to determine how specific legal principles might apply to their unique situations. Moreover, an understanding of the intent and underlying principles of statutes and legal decisions can help policymakers anticipate legal challenges and structure defensible assessment programs. Even if an assessment program is challenged in court, good faith attempts to follow applicable legal principles and measurement standards will assist the program in obtaining a favorable decision."

Legal Implications of High-Stakes Assessment is available for $19.95 from the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, (708) 571-4700.

AN ONLINE NEWSLETTER FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION EXPLORES CURRENT ISSUES IN SCHOOL REFORM. The newsletter is intended to help school, district, and state leaders explore key topics in improving America's schools.

Each issue focuses on a critical education reform element, describes current thinking and activities, and offers sources of additional information. The newsletter shares ideas nationwide on how states and school districts are reforming education and how U.S. Department of Education programs and initiatives can help.

The Spring 1996 issue of *Improving America's Schools: A Newsletter on Issues in School Reform* focuses on alternative assessments. Among the topics it touches on are content and performance standards, technical quality, assessment requirements under Title I, promising approaches, and research findings. It also provides a list of resources for further reading.

The online newsletter can be found in the Education Department's Online Library at http://www.ed.gov/pubs/IASA/newsletters.

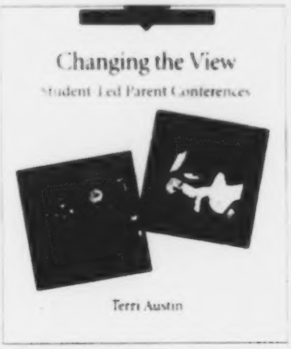
DURING THE PAST FIVE YEARS, THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON EVALUATION, STANDARDS, AND STUDENT TESTING (CRESST) has produced more than 65 technical reports, 18 newsletter publications, two full-length videos, and many book chapters and journal articles contributing to assessment reform in America. Educators can now have easy access to this research with the CRESST *5 Years of Research* CD-ROM. The research on the CD is organized to meet the needs of various audiences, including teachers, parents, policymakers, and researchers. It is also organized by assessment topics to allow users to read research in 10 areas, including portfolios, equity, standards, technical issues, and scoring. Keyword searching allows users to search the entire disc, which is fully indexed. A number of other products on classroom assessment also are available from CRESST. For further information contact Kim Hurst by phone at (310) 206-1532 or by e-mail at kim@cse.ucla.edu. Additional assessment information can be found at CRESST's Web site at http://www.cse.ucla.edu/CRESSThome.html.

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER PROVIDES READERS WITH AN INDEPTH EXPLORATION OF PORTFOLIOS AS A CLASSROOM- AND LARGE-SCALE ASSESSMENT STRATEGY. Published by the Portfolio Assessment Clearinghouse, a network of educators involved in portfolio assessment, the *Portfolio News* tackles a wide range of topics. Recent issues have addressed such topics as:

- The politics of large-scale assessment
- Using portfolio reflections to reform instructional programs and build curriculum
- Connecting classroom and large-scale assessment
- Using portfolios in an ESL classroom
- Improving AIDS education via portfolios

The newsletter includes articles by students as well as educators; listings of resources and portfolio projects around the country; literature reviews; and a calendar of workshops and conferences.

To subscribe to *Portfolio News*, send $32 to *Portfolio News*: Subscriptions, University of California, San Diego, Teacher Education Program, 9500 Gilman Drive-0070, La Jolla, CA 92093-0070. (Make checks payable to *Portfolio News*.)



IN *CHANGING THE VIEW: STUDENT-LED PARENT CONFERENCES* (HEINEMANN, PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE, 1994), A SIXTH-GRADE TEACHER FROM FAIRBANKS, ALASKA, STEPS BACK and offers the responsibility of assessment to her students. Terri Austin presents an alternative to the traditional teacher-parent conference by putting students in the role of expert. By reflecting on their own learning, seeking out the views of others, and preparing their own portfolios, these students come to know themselves as learners. As a result, the end-of-quarter review becomes a time of sharing successes and celebrating learning.

Writes Austin: "I thought back to my elementary years and remembered my feeling of dread when my mother attended parent conferences. I realize now that I was a pretty good student, but then I never knew that. I always wondered what bad things the teacher was saying about me and if I would pass on to the next grade. I was like the students in my room. I had no knowledge of the assessment process, and I had no real concept of myself as a learner."

As she thought about this, she realized there were three key issues: first, the students accepted no responsibility for their learning; second, she, the teacher, totally controlled the process; and three, parent contact was minimal. Through student-led conferences, she began a process of giving students control over and responsibility for their learning.

Combining assessment, teacher research, parent involvement, and student-centered responsibility, *Changing the View* is aimed at teachers or administrators who want their students to assume more responsibility for learning—to be active rather than passive learners.

A TRAINING VIDEO DEVELOPED BY NWREL GIVES PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR INCORPORATING PORTFOLIOS INTO INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT. The 20-minute video, *Putting Portfolios to Work*, developed by Ruth Culham and Vicki Spandel of the Laboratory's Assessment and Accountability Program, takes viewers into actual classrooms to see how teachers use portfolios in practice. Along with an accompanying facilitator's guide and a 150-page textbook, the video forms the basis of a flexible workshop that could begin in a staff meeting or last a full day.

Teachers are counseled to let the curriculum drive the portfolio, to put students in charge of assembling the portfolio, and to think of the portfolio as a process rather than a product. The video describes four kinds of portfolios, each with a different focus and purpose: celebrational portfolios, growth portfolios, selected-works portfolios, and "passportfolios."

The Northwest Laboratory also has developed a 14-video Classroom Assessment Training Program offering complete staff-development packages on many student assessment strategies. Topics include measuring thinking in the classroom; assessing reading proficiency; writing assessment; and assessment in the science classroom. For details and ordering information on any of these materials, contact IOX Educational Research and Development at (310) 822-3275 or (310) 822-0269.

A READABLE, REALITY-BASED BOOK, *AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT IN ACTION: STUDIES OF SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS AT WORK*, (Teachers College Press, 1995) examines how five schools have developed authentic, performance-based assessments of students' learning. Authors Linda Darling-Hammond, Jacqueline Ancess, and Beverly Falk describe how this work has interacted with and influenced the teaching and learning experiences students encounter in school. Case studies of two elementary and three secondary schools detail how the schools are using a variety of strategies for "personalizing instruction, deepening students' engagement with subject matter, and assessing learning in rigorous and holistic ways," the authors write.

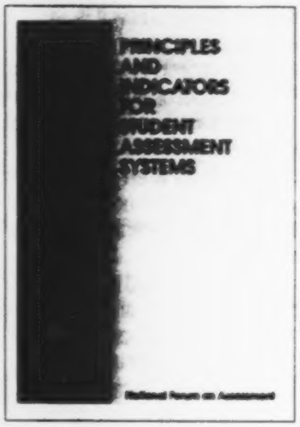
"The case studies," they say, "examine how authentic assessment supports changes in curriculum, teaching, and school organization and how it is, in turn, embedded in and supported by these aspects of school life. The cases document the changes in student work and learning that can accompany new approaches to assessment when these are embedded in a schoolwide effort to create learner-centered education."

Schools profiled are a Harlem secondary school; an international high school for newly arrived immigrant students in New York City; a Delaware vocational-technical high school; a racially and economically mixed elementary school in Brooklyn; and an elementary magnet school in the Bronx.

"With all the burgeoning interest in alternative forms of assessment," the authors note, "there is yet very little rich description of how schools develop and use strategies such as portfolios, projects, performance tasks, and other documentation of student accomplishments to inform instruction and to stimulate greater learning. This volume begins to develop a school's eye view of authentic assessment, aiming to illuminate how it can enrich life in classrooms and focus the energies of students, teachers, and other members of the school community on deep learning demonstrated through applications and performances."

Darling-Hammond is a professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University, and co-director of the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching, where Ancess is a senior research associate and Falk is associate director for research.

Authentic Assessment in Action is available for $24.95 (plus $2.50 for shipping) from Teachers College Press, (800) 575-6566.



A COALITION OF EDUCATION AND CIVIL RIGHTS GROUPS FROM ACROSS THE NATION RECENTLY RELEASED A SET OF GUIDELINES FOR OVERHAULING SCHOOL TESTING PRACTICES as part of the broader education reform movement. According to the *Principles and Indicators for Student Assessment Systems*, developed by the National Forum on Assessment, supporting student learning must be the primary purpose of assessment. Providing the public with information about overall school performance remains important, the forum asserts, but must not undermine classroom assessments designed to improve student achievement.

"The heart of the principles is the understanding that the primary purpose of assessment is to serve learning," says Monty Neill, Associate Director of the National Center for Fair and Open Testing and co-chair of the forum. "Thus, they call for building assessment systems up from high-quality classroom practices."

The forum's other co-chair, Ruth Mitchell of The Education Trust of the American Association for Higher Education, adds: "This means that other assessments, such as those for accountability and certification, must support and not undermine high-quality education. Assessment reforms must be integrated with changes in instruction and curriculum."

The seven principles are:

- Assessment's primary purpose is to improve student learning
- Assessment for other purposes supports student learning
- Assessment systems are fair to all students
- Professional collaboration and development support assessment
- The broad community participates in assessment development
- Communication about assessment is regular and clear
- Assessment systems are regularly reviewed and improved

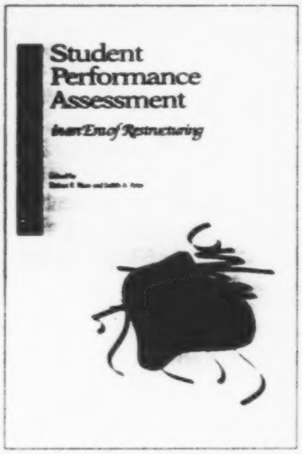
The principles have the endorsement of more than 80 organizations, including the National Education Association, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the National Associations of Elementary and Secondary School Principals, the PTA, and the Council of the Great City Schools.

Copies of *Principles and Indicators for Student Assessment Systems* are available for $10 each from the National Forum, c/o Fair Test, 342 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02139.

A HALF-DOZEN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT INFORMATION AND TOOLS ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE NWREL TEST CENTER. Hundreds of books, articles, and tools are described in topical bibliographies covering six assessment areas:

- Portfolios
- Reading
- Social studies
- Math
- Science
- Affective education (school climate, student self-concept, and student attitudes)

Copies of the bibliographies are available from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. For ordering information, contact Linda Revels at (503) 275-9519.



EDUCATORS WHO WANT CUTTING-EDGE INFORMATION ON NEW FORMS OF ASSESSMENT CAN SAVE COUNTLESS RESEARCH HOURS by going straight to a rich new resource from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

An encyclopedic collection of almost 100 papers and articles by some of the best-known names in the field offers one-stop shopping on assessment. Topics range from "anchor papers" to outcomes, group performance to portfolios, reform to rubrics, reliability to validity. Edited by NWREL researchers Robert Blum and Judith Arter, *A Handbook for Student Performance Assessment in an Era of Restructuring* gives breadth and depth to a subject that is critical to the success of school reform.

The handbook discusses why assessments need to change and how performance-based approaches can guide school improvement. It explains how to base assessments on goals for student learning and integrate assessments with curriculum and instruction. It explores how to design performance tasks and evaluate the quality of student performance. It talks about how to implement performance assessments at the classroom, school, and district levels and monitor the results. Included are dozens of assessments that require students to respond to realistic situations and apply skills from various subjects. A glossary of assessment terms wraps up the volume.

"Performance assessment is one of the hottest topics in education today," write Blum and Arter in the handbook's introduction. "It seems as though assessment, particularly performance assessment, enters every discussion about schools—and rightly so, for assessment is the basis for determining the success of students, teachers, and schools. Developing high-quality assessments, however, has proven the most difficult aspect of improving schools."

The 650-page handbook, bound in a three-ring binder, is organized into 10 chapters:

- Setting the Stage
- Placing Student Performance Assessment Within the Context of School Restructuring
- Developing Student Learning Goals for the 21st Century
- Aligning Assessment with Curriculum and Instruction
- Designing Performance Assessment Tasks
- Establishing Performance Criteria
- Implementing Performance Assessment
- Performance Assessment Examples
- Using Performance Assess-

ment Information for Improvement
- Resources

"Performance assessment is hardly new," note Blum and Arter. "What is new are the attempts to give such assessments a more central role in large-scale assessment and to make the judgments that occur within the classroom more systematic. The challenge in both these areas is to make subjective assessments as objective as possible; to make them more systematic and, therefore, more credible."

Copies of *A Handbook for Student Performance Assessment in an Era of Restructuring* can be ordered by sending $120 to: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1250 N. Pitt Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. For more information, call the ASCD at (800) 933-2723.

Improving Science and Mathematics Education

A Toolkit for Professional Developers: Alternative Assessment

TO HELP MATH AND SCIENCE TEACHERS MAKE THE SHIFT FROM TRADITIONAL TO ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES, the 10 regional educational laboratories have published a giant collection of professional development materials. *Improving Science and Mathematics Education—A Toolkit for Professional Developers* (Regional Educational Laboratory Network, 1994) is designed for staff developers to assist teachers and other educators to better assess math and science performance using alternative assessments.

"The goal of the *Toolkit*," says Judith Arter of the Northwest Laboratory, "is to promote both good consumerism of existing assessments and sound development and use of new assessments."

The document's seven chapters contain information on innovative assessments in math and science, the rationale for alternative assessments, different views of integrating assessment and instruction, alternative assessment design options, guidelines on the characteristics of sound alternative assessments, assistance with grading and reporting, and help with designing meaningful professional development. Included are more than 20 sample assessments.

All activities include participant handouts, hard copies of overheads, and a facilitator's outline. A bibliography and resource directory also are included.

"The *Toolkit* is a compilation of activities and supportive materials developed not only as an alternative assessment resource, but as a means of engaging teachers in dialogue about changing the way math and science have traditionally been taught and assessed," says Jackie Palmer of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

The *Toolkit* is available for $38.85 from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204. Also available is an addendum ($21.75) published last spring that expands and updates the *Toolkit*. For additional information, contact Linda Revels at NWREL's Document Reproduction Service, (503) 275-9519.

GEOF HEWITT, ONE OF THE DESIGNERS OF VERMONT'S STATEWIDE PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT SYSTEM, HAS WRITTEN AN INFORMATIVE, ENGAGING BOOK FULL OF PRACTICAL WISDOM. *A Portfolio Primer: Teaching, Collecting, and Assessing Student Writing* (Heinemann, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1995) explains how teachers can build a "community of writers" in which students demonstrate progress and accomplishment across the curriculum.

Drawing on his experiences as a writer, writing teacher, and leader in Vermont's portfolio-development project, Hewitt explores such issues as:
- Teacher guidance versus student ownership
- Electronic portfolios
- Portfolios and parents
- Portfolios across the curriculum
- Portfolio assessment and report cards
- Benchmarking
- Self-assessment; standards of reliability; and performance versus multiple choice

Written in lively, humor-filled prose, the book is loaded with anecdotes from real-life experience, and presents a couple of actual student portfolios as examples.

"One of the most powerful components of the portfolio, a letter or essay the student writes about the work in the portfolio, structures and makes visible the student's self-reflection," Hewitt writes.

"In Vermont, this takes the form of a 'best-piece' letter,' in which, after selecting the 'best piece' in the portfolio, the student writes about why it was selected as best piece and how it was composed, with any incidental comments the student wished to make about writing."

VOYAGE

Continued from page 15

■

"Dear Mom and Dad,

I guess this is the last portfolio letter you'll have to read... bummer. Well, I've tried something a little different this time—you'll notice that this portfolio is divided by the categories of Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive skills. In this portfolio, I would like to show the levels of thinking that Phoenix requires, how they relate to my level of work, and how my work has progressed and improved. I've included explanations throughout the portfolio; this is not simply a collection of my work. I really do want you to read through this. You might actually learn something."

—Chad Denton, senior
Phoenix program
Juneau Douglas High School

From its grass-roots beginnings in Juneau's primary classrooms, the portfolio initiative has traveled throughout the ranks. Adding one grade level each year, the district so far has trained all first- through fifth-grade teachers in using portfolios for language arts instruction and assessment. District committees are revising report cards for intermediate grades and exploring ways to pull other subjects into the portfolios.

Most parents have been supportive of portfolios from Year One, when a group of first-grade teachers gave detailed presentations on the content, purpose, and mechanics of portfolios at fall parent-teacher conferences. When teachers are comfortable and well-versed in the hows and whys of portfolios, they are able to pass on that confidence to parents, Sorenson notes.

Portfolios have popped up, too, in Juneau's secondary programs. The high school's Phoenix program, with an emphasis on independent learning and advanced technology, requires students to compile extensive portfolios keyed to state and national standards. And Dzantik'i Heeni Middle School uses rubrics, self-reflection, and portfolios in its assessment mix.

Having grappled with design and implementation for eight years, the Juneau portfolio entrepreneurs share their hard-won expertise with districts around the state. Among their recommendations are:

- Fold portfolios into everyday activities. Don't make them an add-on. ("Make the process child-centered so the child has ownership in it, and it's part of their regular day, their regular week—not just something you do at the end of the quarter," advises Cary.)
- Make sure principals are committed to the process and are willing to provide leadership and support. ("You need to have the middle-level administrators really in on it and believing it," says Tonkovich. "If you want it to be done, somebody's got to monitor it, and it can't be the curriculum director sitting over in the central office.")
- Provide extensive staff development for both existing teachers and new staff as they join the ranks. ("It takes more than a quick meeting to help them figure it out," says Cary.)
- Give the process room to grow, change, and evolve to meet teacher and student needs. ("It's the sort of thing you always have to keep talking about and revising," says Tonkovich. "It has to be an alive process with constant input.")
- Keep parents informed and updated from the beginning to assure them that content is not being ignored. ("The bottom line is, parents are scared to death their kids aren't going to make it in the world," says Sorenson. "They want to make sure their kids are successful. Their questions are very valid questions.")
- Develop a portfolio system tailored to local needs and designed by teaching staff to ensure ownership and commitment. ("If you provide opportunities to discuss and reflect," says Sorenson, "most people will internalize the concepts and then build from what they know and what works in their classroom.")

Juneau continues to wrestle with portfolios. Not all teachers are on board. Many resist looking at last year's portfolios, wanting to form their own judgments about students' abilities. Some see portfolios as the latest flash-in-the-pan reform, and they're waiting for them to go away. The changes were introduced too quickly or too slowly, depending on whom you talk to. Some say kids need to be more involved in compiling the portfolios. Almost everyone agrees that teachers need more training in how to use the portfolios effectively. And the biggest bugaboo—pinning down the purpose of the portfolios—is an ongoing source of frustration.

"We need to make sure that if we decide to have a high-stakes portfolio, that high-stakes portfolio is clearly defined," Sorenson says. "I think as a district system, we have to decide what that yellow portfolio is."

Problems aside, portfolios have taken hold in Juneau and are being folded, little by little, into classroom culture. The place where curriculum, instruction, and assessment overlap is where real change happens, says Sorenson. It is at that convergence, she says, where Juneau's portfolios reside. And it is in that linking and blending that portfolios have their power.

"In addition to making our teachers much better teachers, the portfolio process has made a lot of our students much better learners," says Tonkovich. "Ultimately, as in all of education, it depends on the teacher. In classrooms where it's done well, portfolios have really made a difference for kids."

RESOURCE NOTES: Juneau has published its hard-won portfolio strategies in two handbooks, one for primary grades and one for intermediate grades. The Juneau Language Arts Portfolio Handbook *is an indepth description of the district's portfolio process, complete with directions for teachers. Designed by a team of teachers and curriculum specialists, and based upon feedback from teachers experienced in using the portfolio process, the documents include, among other things:*

- *A description of portfolio content*
- *Samples of all continuums, checklists, and rating forms*
- *Instructions for administering structured writing tests*
- *A discussion of student self-reflection*
- *An explanation of how to use computers in the portfolio process*
- *Ways to involve parents in portfolios*

To obtain copies of the Juneau Language Arts Portfolio Handbook, *contact the Curriculum Department, Juneau Borough Public Schools, (907) 463-1967.* ■

Conference

Continued from page 19

thing, students get better with practice. A student who is new to Mount Scott will be baffled by a question such as, "How do you view yourself as a learner?" says Woodlee. These students, like younger students, will need more prompts and assistance in structuring their student-led presentation.

Utz recalls with distaste the parent-teacher conferences she held at another school. During the conferences, she sat at her desk with a stack of report cards on one side and a schedule of 20-minute appointments on the other. "You would lay the report card out, and you would frantically try to go through this report card and then you would say, 'And do you have any other questions about your child?'"

By the time 10 conferences had gone by, Utz often found herself wondering, "Did I already say this?"

"It's just totally removed from the child," she says of the process.

At schools that have student-led parent conferences, the report card, though not discussed at the conference, holds few surprises for parents or students.

"Usually by the end of a portfolio presentation, anything that's on a report card has been explained over and over again through that presentation," says Woodlee. "Students will show their parents what they can do. Sometimes a parent will say, 'Why isn't such and such in here?' Maybe it's because a student just didn't do that, and then that is evident also. Students can then explain to their parents why that piece isn't there or why their science project didn't get finished."

Some students will never look good on a report card. But at student-led parent conferences, even struggling students can shine. These are the ones who seem to stand out in teachers' minds.

"I just almost want to cry to think about it," says Utz, recalling a learning-disabled first-grader who could not yet read or write but was nonetheless able to make an effective presentation. "It doesn't mean his work is grade-level by any means, but he can talk about it, he can show what he's done. And he's every bit as articulate about it as the TAG student at the next table."

RESOURCE NOTES: Available books on student-led conferences include Changing the View: Student-Led Parent Conferences *by Terri Austin (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994) and* Student-Led Teacher Parent Conferences *by Nancy Little and John Allan (Toronto, Canada: Lugus, 1988).* ■

HIGH STAKES

Continued from page 28

needed to make sure the full range of student abilities is sampled.

Yet another technical issue is comparability: Will tasks produce comparable results from student to student, school to school, district to district? Experts acknowledge that the costs—both in time and money—of designing, refining, administering, and scoring assessments that meet rigorous standards of reliability, validity, generalizability, and comparability are huge.

In *Technical Issues in Large-Scale Assessment*, Richard Jaeger and colleagues write: "One reason for having performance standards is to attempt to establish comparability among the performances of students in different jurisdictions. That is, theoretically, parents of students in one state and school district could compare their children's performance to students' achievements in another state or country, or employers and colleges could make comparisons across students. Further, school systems and the nation could monitor trends across time in attaining curriculum standards. Yet a score on one task often means little in predicting the score on a second, seemingly related, but different task, either for individuals or for groups of students.

"Developing comparable standards across performance assessments," Jaeger concludes, "appears to be the most problematic venture of all."

As promising as performance assessments are, they should not be embraced to the total exclusion of other methods, researchers warn. Multiple-choice tests, they say, still have a place in the assessment mix. Stiggins argues that multiple-choice tests (along with true/false, matching, and other "selected-response" tests in which students choose the best response from an array of options) are valuable tools for finding out whether students have mastered content knowledge. In performance assessments, content knowledge is mixed in with a lot of other skills and is tough to isolate. In his book, *Student-Centered Classroom Assessment*, Stiggins calls for balance.

"Performance assessment and objectively scored paper-and-pencil tests do not represent different ways to assess the same things," he writes. "They attend to different outcomes. Further, one is not inherently superior to the other. They are equally powerful in fulfilling their respective assessment roles—in the hands of qualified users."

Walter Haney and George Madaus, writing in the *Phi Delta Kappan* in May 1989, make an eloquent plea for a reasoned approach—one that doesn't tip the scales too heavily in one direction. "Technologies of educational assessments (of whatever variety) in and of themselves will never cure the ills commonly attributed to standardized tests," they assert. "More than new forms of assessment, what is needed is a refusal to accept bondage to any single technology—no matter how useful it may be in a particular instance—and thoughtful selection of different kinds and mixes of assessments for different purposes."

RESOURCE NOTES: The report Technical Issues in Large-Scale Performance Assessment *is available for $10 from the U.S. Government Bookstore in Portland, (503) 221-6217.* ■

Assessment Alternatives

Performance assessments can be designed to use a wide range of tasks and strategies. Here are some examples:

Computer Adaptive Testing	Any assessment, other than multiple-choice questions or worksheets, that requires the student to respond to the assessment items or task with the aid of a computer. For example, the student responds to several questions to determine his or her ability and then is moved into the performance task that best meets the student's ability level.
Enhanced multiple-choice	Any multiple-choice question that requires more than the selection of one correct response. Most often, the task requires the students to explain their responses.
Extended-response, open-ended	Any item or task that requires the student to produce an extended written response to an item or task that does not have one right answer (for example, an essay or laboratory report).
Group performance assessment	Any assessment that requires students to perform the assessment task in a group setting. For example, a performance assessment as defined in individual performance assessment becomes a group performance assessment when the task is performed in a group and the individual's rating is based on his or her performance as part of the group.
Individual performance assessment	Any assessment that requires the student to perform (in a way that can be observed) an assessment task alone. For example, a student may be asked to perform a laboratory experiment or carry out a community service project and write about the results. The performance of the laboratory experiment and the community service project makes this assessment an individual performance assessment versus an extended-response assessment, when the quality of the performance itself and not just the quality of the writing is rated.
Interview	An assessment technique in which the student responds to verbal questions from the assessor.
Nontraditional test items	Any assessment activity other than a multiple-choice item from which the student selects one response. These items or performances are rated using an agreed-upon set of performance criteria in the form of a scoring guide or a scoring rubric or in comparison to benchmark papers or performances.
Observation	An assessment technique that requires the student to perform a task while being observed and rated using an agreed-upon set of scoring criteria.
Portfolio	An accumulation of a student's work over time that demonstrates growth toward the mastery of specific performance criteria against which the tasks included in the portfolio can be judged.
Project, exhibition, or demonstration	The accomplishment of a complex task over time that requires demonstrating mastery of a variety of desired outcomes, each with its own performance criteria, that can be assessed within the one project, exhibition, or demonstration.
Short-answer, open-ended	Any item or task that requires the production of a short written response on the part of the respondent. Most often, there is a single right answer (for example, a fill-in-the-blank or short written response to a question).

SOURCE: *The Status of State Student Assessment Programs in the United States*. Council of Chief State School Officers/North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, June 1995

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Spring issue
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Summer issue
Preparation of Teachers for the 21st Century

**You are invited to send us article ideas,
identify places where good things are happening,
provide descriptions of effective techniques being used,
suggest useful resources, and submit letters to the editor.**

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COVER PHOTO: CHILDREN FROM BUCKMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, THE ARTS MAGNET SCHOOL IN PORTLAND, OREGON, GET A CASE OF THE GIGGLES DURING A PHOTO SESSION. PHOTOGRAPHED BY TONY KNEIDEK, NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

Learning in the Early Years

was six years old in 1955, the year I started first grade. I don't remember much about those first years at Grover Cleveland Elementary School in Chicago: just tidy classrooms, stern teachers, and well-groomed little boys and girls who sat in wooden seats at wooden desks lined in straight and narrow rows.

I remember naps in kindergarten after cookies and milk (something I miss to this day). I recall having a crush on my second-grade teacher, and a run-in with my third-grade teacher, the one who poked her finger into my forehead and chastised me in front of the entire class for getting a math problem wrong. I still don't like math.

Fortunately, the ways and means of primary education—those years from prekindergarten through third grade—are changing. Innovative teachers now work individually with students, often in concert with their parents, other teachers, and the students themselves. Developmentally appropriate practices, multiage classrooms, multicultural lessons, and cooperative learning are among the strategies used in primary education.In the best schools, children learn that learning is fun.

But all is not well in primary education. Too many schools still rely on age-specific curricula, textbooks, worksheets, and skill drills to teach young children. Too many teachers have too many children in classrooms sorely lacking in resources and materials. Too little attention is paid to helping teachers obtain the new skills necessary in today's increasingly diverse classrooms. Too many families live in or near poverty and are unable to actively engage in their children's educations. And, too often, too little money is available to provide for the educational needs of children.

In a report more than seven years ago, *Newsweek* magazine noted: "Why is it that we know so much about how young children learn, and yet we do so little of it in our schools? Ages five through eight are…when children begin learning to study, to reason, to cooperate. We can put them in desks and drill them all day, or we can keep them moving, touching, exploring. The experts favor a hands-on approach, but changing the way schools teach isn't easy."

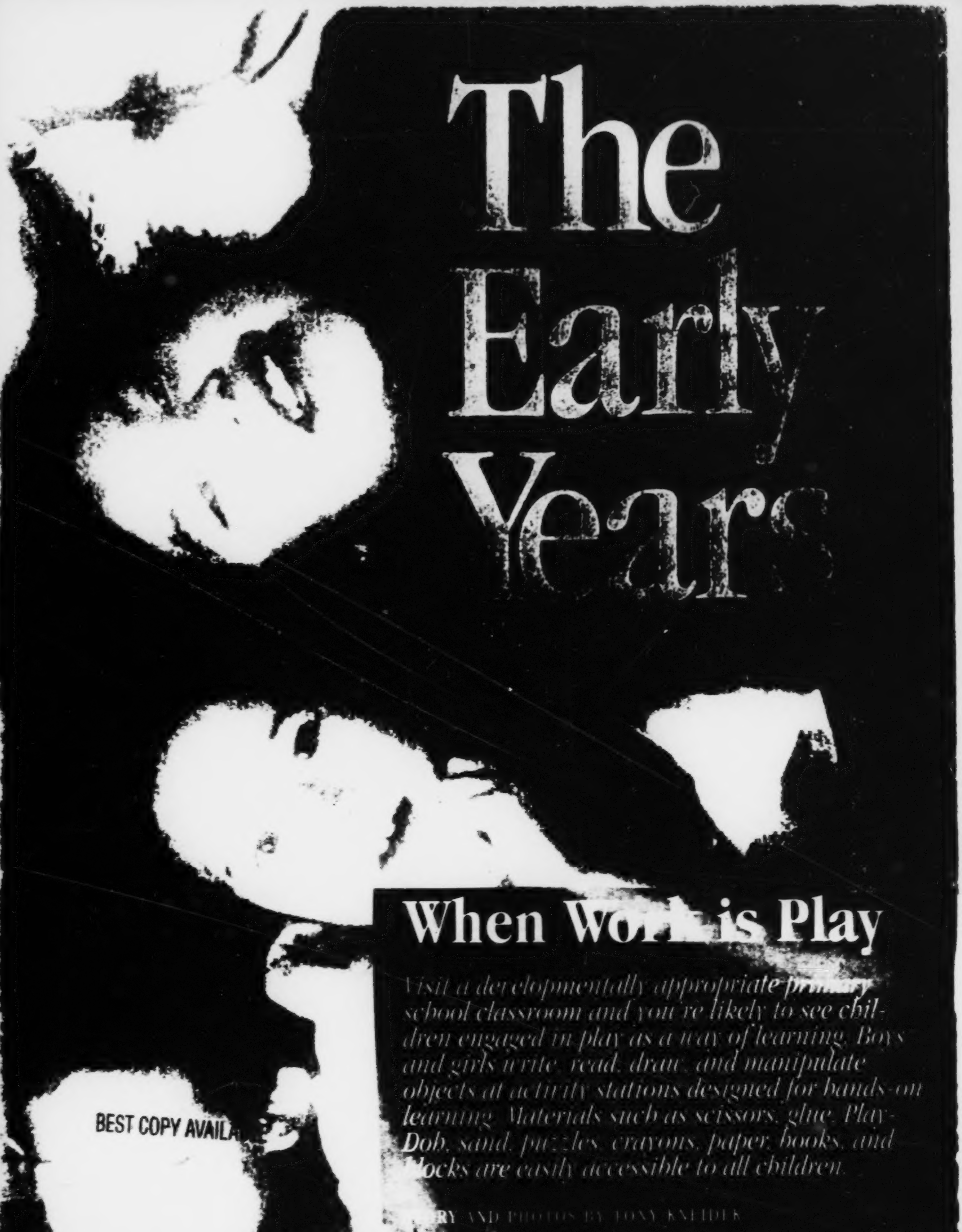
No, it isn't easy. But throughout the Northwest, classrooms, schools, and entire districts are changing. They are providing children opportunities to learn and explore in dynamic, tactile, and engaging environments. *Northwest Education* visited four such schools for this issue on The Early Years. We interviewed teachers, administrators, parents, and students; observed innovative teachers; listened to students' stories and watched them as they struggled and shined with reading, writing, spelling, drawing, and working together.

We witnessed learning among the youngest students.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Northwest Education*. Drop us a line if you'd like to add your views to the discussion. Our address is on the back cover of the magazine. We look forward to hearing from you.

—Tony Kneidek

kneidekt@nwrel.org



The Early Years

When Work is Play

Visit a developmentally appropriate primary school classroom and you're likely to see children engaged in play as a way of learning. Boys and girls write, read, draw, and manipulate objects at activity stations designed for hands-on learning. Materials such as scissors, glue, Play-Doh, sand, puzzles, crayons, paper, books, and blocks are easily accessible to all children.

[illegible]RY AND PHOTOS BY TONY KNEIDEK

You're likely to hear a low hum as children talk and work together. But in this classroom, noise is a good thing, evidence that children are engaged in their work and sharing ideas. The teacher may be in conference with a single child or working with a group of kids on a project. Occasionally, the entire class comes together. They might share a common lesson in reading and writing taught by the teacher. Or they might participate in author's corner, where children share their work with classmates. You'll even hear them singing to ease transitions and build community.

Spelling is taught in the context of reading and writing. And reading and writing are taught by…well, by reading and writing. Gone are the straight-and-narrow rows of desks, color-in-the-lines stencils, dittos, worksheets, and teacher-directed lessons on just about everything.

But even in such a child-centered environment, problems exist. Look into the eyes of the children—in nearly any school, anywhere—and you're likely to see hunger as well as nourishment, poverty as well as wealth, abuse as well as good health. And those problems are intensified in areas of high poverty, in neighborhoods where violence flares nightly, in communities fractured by indifference and neglect, and in classrooms with upwards of 35 or 40 students, many of them at-risk or learning disabled.

These early years, the years in which children shine and show so much promise, are increasingly the years in which children begin a slide into lifelong failure. Consider, for example, these findings as reported in ***Years of Promise: A Comprehensive Learning Strategy for America's Children*** by the Carnegie Corporation:

- In 1994, the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that nearly 75 percent of the nation's fourth-graders were reading below grade level. Forty-two percent were unable to reach even the basic level of performance, which requires only literal comprehension of reading passages.
- In the same year, 66 percent of fourth-graders could not meet the standards set for persuasive, narrative, and informative writing.
- In mathematics, 82 percent of fourth-graders were below the standards on the 1992 NAEP assessment; 39 percent could not solve easy problems, such as "divide 108 by nine."

It needn't be this way. "No one has all the answers yet," note the authors of ***Years of Promise***. "But enough is now known about learning and development in children between the ages of three and 10 to begin making significant progress in improving the education of every child. What needs to happen now is to put this knowledge and wisdom to work, within and across the sectors, on a large enough scale to make significant improvement in children's educational achievement nationwide."

A Changing World

Children are naturally curious about their surroundings and anxious to learn about all they see, touch, hear, feel, and smell. Ironically, children today are performing about as well as their parents and teachers who were in classrooms 25 years ago. And some groups of children, notably African Americans, are performing better than ever before, though they still lag behind their European American classmates.

So if kids are on par with their parents, what's the problem? The problem is that too many kids are being prepared for a world that no longer exists. Imagine going to your job with only the tools you used 25 years ago. Sure, you'd be on par with those who preceded you, but you'd be light years away from the technological and workplace advances that have taken place in the last quarter-century.

And so it is with schools. The old skills taught in lecture-listen format no longer serve the purposes of learners, the needs of society, or the goals of the country as a whole. Children today need to develop skills in critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and technology.

"The United States of the 21st century will require a much more highly educated and skilled population than it has now if it is to maintain future prosperity and ensure democratic renewal," the authors of *Years of Promise* report. "No longer can the American education system allow so many young people to fall short of their academic promise."

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in state Departments of Education have adopted a set of guiding principles on appropriate curriculum for children from three to eight years old. They are:

- Children learn best when their physical needs are met and they feel psychologically safe and secure
- Children learn through active involvement with people and materials
- Children learn through social interaction with adults and other children
- Children's learning reflects a recurring cycle that begins with awareness, and moves to exploration, inquiry, and finally to utilization
- Children learn through play
- Children's interests and need to know motivate learning
- Human development and learning are characterized by individual variation

Issues of Diversity Must Be Addressed

The American education system is a reflection of the larger society. As such, it must address a raft of issues that were in large part ignored or manipulated by previous generations. School boundaries can no longer be drawn to exclude all but White children. Those with learning disabilities or handicapping conditions have been moved into mainstream classrooms. More children are coming to school hungry, abused, and neglected than in previous decades.

Diversity in the classroom brings with it a host of issues and requires that teachers reevaluate their strategies to ensure that the needs of all children are being met.

"The 'practice of freedom' is fundamental to antibias education," writes Louise Derman-Sparks in *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children*. "Curriculum goals are to enable every child to construct knowledgeable, confident self-identity; to develop comfortable, empathetic, and just interaction with diversity; and to develop critical thinking and the skills for standing up for oneself and others in the face of injustice."

All children, notes Derman-Sparks, are affected by the "prevailing bias in U.S. society." As a result, the strategies teachers use must address the different needs of different children. For example, children of color must "develop both a strong self-identity and a proud and knowledgeable group identity to withstand the attacks of racism," Derman-Sparks writes. "In contrast, White children's task is to develop a positive identity without White ethnocentricism and superiority."

And teachers of color, notes researcher, writer, and educator Lisa Delpit, must be included and heard in any discussions regarding educational reform. This has not been the case thus far, she asserts in ***Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom***.

"It is time to look closely at elements of our educational system, particularly those elements we consider progressive; time to see whether there is minority involvement and support, and if not, to ask why; time to reassess what we are doing in public schools and universities to include other voices, other experiences; time to seek the diversity in our educational movements that we talk about seeking in our classrooms. ...The key is to understand the variety of meanings available for any human interaction, and not to assume that the voices of the majority speak for all."

Messages about diversity are not always welcome in public school classrooms and may be difficult for teachers to integrate into their classroom strategies. School boards may balk at implementing new curricula that focus on the strengths of different cultures, genders, and ethnicities. Parents may object to new ways of doing things. Administrators may not be supportive. And teachers themselves may be uncomfortable with the social change that is at the heart of anti-bias curriculum.

"Nevertheless, it is worth the hard work," says Derman-Sparks. "Through anti-bias curriculum, teachers enable every child to achieve the ultimate goal of early childhood education: the development of each child to her or his fullest potential."

The Role of DAP

Many involved in educating children from three to eight years old embrace the developmentally appropriate practices detailed by the NAEYC. "Development is a truly fascinating and wonderful phenomenon," the NAEYC notes in ***Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age Eight***. "It is not something to be accelerated or skipped. One period of childhood or aspect of development is not better or more important than another; each has its own tasks to accomplish."

The NAEYC notes that there are two dimensions of developmental appropriateness: age and individual. "Simply stated," the organization noted recently, "this term means that the teacher's expectations and classroom activities are safe and achievable by children of the age span, and that the learning activities are implemented giving attention to the different needs, interests, and developmental levels of individual children."

It is not a dogmatic approach, but a research-based set of beliefs about how children learn best. What DAP does, the NAEYC says, is:

- Encourage teachers to prepare a variety of challenging learning activities that may include, but go beyond, paper and pencil tasks
- Help children gain skills and knowledge while nurturing their desires to learn
- Recognize that children should demonstrate more than just memorization of facts; they must apply learning in meaningful contexts
- Call for a more flexible timetable for children struggling to learn to read; this avoids grade retention (which does not increase achievement)
- Maintain clear structures so that students know exactly what is expected of them
- Afford students the opportunity to regulate their own behaviors

Of course, education alone cannot meet the growing and varied needs of children and families. Increasingly, schools and other institutions—health organizations, social service agencies, churches, and other community organizations—are looking for ways to work together to benefit children and families. "Children and families benefit from comprehensive strategies on many levels," write the authors of *Putting the Pieces Together: Comprehensive School-Linked Strategies for Children and Families.* "They get help facing immediate challenges, learn lifelong methods for improving their own circumstances, gain access to an integrated and streamlined system of continuous human development, and become better able to participate in their own learning." The U.S. Department of Education publication notes that comprehensive services:

- Help children and families by building community resources and relationships
- Help children and families solve immediate problems and develop the capacity to avoid future crises
- Build collaboration among all of the community's major groups and cultures, including parents, churches, and a range of agencies and organizations in addition to schools
- Involve multiple stakeholders in all stages of program planning, design, and implementation
- Communicate in languages accessible to all partners
- Flow from a shared vision about improving long-term conditions for children, families, and communities—not simply a goal of providing services or treating a problem

Keying in on Fun

Look at me, look at me,
Look at me now.
It is fun to have fun,
But you have to know how.
—Dr. Seuss

Visit a primary classroom where developmentally appropriate practices are being employed in effective ways, and you'll most likely see children having fun while they're learning. "A growing body of research has emerged recently affirming that children learn most effectively through a concrete, play-oriented approach to early childhood education," the NAEYC notes. "Children's play is a primary vehicle for and indicator of their mental growth. Play enables children to progress along the developmental sequence from the sensorimotor intelligence of infancy to preparational thought in the preschool years to the concrete operational thinking exhibited by primary children. In addition to its role in cognitive development, play also serves important functions in children's physical, emotional, and social development. Therefore, child-initiated, child-directed, teacher-supported play is an essential component of developmentally appropriate practice."

RESOURCE NOTES: Other helpful publications include Other People's Children *by Lisa Delpit, The New York Press,* Developmentally Appropriate and Culturally Responsive Education: Theory in Practice *by Rebecca Novick, NWREL, and* Invitations: Changing as Teachers and Learners K-12 *by Regie Routman, Heinemann Educational Books.* ■

TEACHING AND REACHING EACH CHILD AS AN INDIVIDUAL

Students at
Cherry Valley Elementary School
in Polson, Montana,
are deep into literacy,
language,
and the love of words

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
TONY KNEIDEK

POLSON, Montana—When first-grade teacher Doug Crosby needs help with his writing, he doesn't have to look far. Any of the 20 children sitting comfortably on a braided rug, an easy chair, or an overstuffed sofa will chime out letters, concepts, and sounds that help Crosby get his thoughts down on paper.

It's a group writing process that Crosby begins with a story plan—a drawing of what he is about to write. Once children identify the drawing, Crosby moves onto the story writing. "I'm going to start my story with a special letter called . . . now what is that special letter that starts a story?" Crosby asks.

"A capital letter," the children answer in chorus. "Yes, yes, that's it. But why a capital letter?" Crosby prods. "Because it's the first word in the sentence," children answer. "Ah, of course. And we know that the first word in a sentence starts with a capital letter. Thank you," says Crosby.

He continues his one-sentence story: "Last night I had hot dogs for dinner." When he gets to the word "hot dogs," Crosby again asks the children for help. "What sounds do you hear in 'hhhhot dog,'" he asks, drawing out the sound of the letter "h." Again, the children chime in, identifying the letter and assisting in spelling the whole word. (Such learning, Crosby notes later, is phonics with a twist. Children are identifying letters in the context of words and stories, not as isolated bits of information without real meaning to them.)

When the story is complete, the children have participated in a process of writing, drawing, spelling, and storytelling that lays a foundation for their own work. "Now I want you to close your eyes for a minute," Crosby instructs his students, "and think about something you want to write." He offers suggestions for students to reflect upon before they scatter to tables and begin their own writing and publishing projects. Later that day, they will read their work to the class during Author's Chair, a time for sharing and feedback.

Throughout the day, similar scenes unfold in classrooms at Cherry Valley School. The school, which serves nearly 400 children in kindergarten through fourth grade, has created a vision and mission built on a foundation of language and literacy.

BUILDING A LITERACY TEAM

Principal Elaine Meeks had been a special education teacher and administrator at Cherry Valley for 11 years before becoming principal in 1989. "At the time I was hired as principal," Meeks notes, "the curriculum was resource- and textbook-driven. I wanted to create an educational environment where literacy would be the umbrella for everything we did here."

Such shifts do not come easily. They require research-based practices and strategies and an ability to communicate them clearly. Meeks brought with her a philosophical approach steeped in developmentally appropriate practices, individualized education, and child-centered learning. "I have a deep, internalized belief that all children can learn," Meeks says. "I just know that to be true."

What Meeks needed was to lead her staff to a shared understanding about the concepts behind the educational jargon. When she talked with staff members, they all said their approaches were child-centered, but each had different views of what that meant.

Meeks began a process of inquiry that helped teachers focus on literacy and children. "When I observed teachers in their classrooms, I was looking for developmentally appropriate practices they were already using," she says. "I wanted to reinforce those strategies and build upon them."

Reservation, 1.2 million acres of wilderness and water, meadows and mountains. About 30 percent of the students at Cherry Valley School are Native American, and the school's diversity efforts focus on the culture and traditions of the native people of the area.

As an outgrowth of its focus on literacy, staff at Cherry Valley decided to address the social and health needs of families as well as the education of their children. "We're learning to take our children where they are and build on what they know," Meeks reported at a NWREL literacy institute in 1993. "We're reversing our thinking about children having deficits—we're looking at what kinds of opportunities we can provide for our students. When we really approach instruction through a holistic view of the child, we can't separate the child from the family. All needs must be addressed, including human services."

As a result of those concerns, the Polson School District and other community agencies formed the Polson Partnership, a community-based, family-focused project that provides direct social services and referrals to children and their families. The project established a Family Resource Center at Cherry Valley School in 1993 and hired Co

Meeks also sought information from teachers about their strategies and practices. "I would say, 'Talk to me about why you group children this way. How does it benefit them? Tell me about the information you used in that activity.'

"I wasn't standing there with a clipboard checking items on a list," Meeks says. "I was asking teachers why they do things the way they do. It's incredibly powerful for teachers to be reflective about their practices."

In 1992, Meeks and a handful of teachers attended a NWREL-sponsored workshop, Building Equity in Early Literacy: A Team Approach, that helped guide and direct their literacy project. When they returned to Polson, the newly formed Literacy Leadership Team began a schoolwide process to develop a research- and literacy-based vision for Cherry Valley School that focused on developmentally appropriate practices in a child-centered environment.

Over the years, nearly all teachers at Cherry Valley have served on the leadership team, which has remained true to and expanded upon the literacy values and philosophy that shaped it (see related story, page 12). For example, while there are no multiage classes at Cherry Valley, the school has implemented buddy activities in which students in mixed-age groups work together on literacy activities, and cross-grade teaching teams where first- and second-grade teachers plan together but maintain separate classes.

Two years ago, the school also implemented the Reading Recovery program to assist first-grade students. The program, which was developed in New Zealand 30 years ago, provides one-on-one enrichment for first-graders who are struggling with reading. At Cherry Valley, two teachers trained in Reading Recovery's strategic approaches meet for 30 minutes a day with individual first-graders. Daily take-home reading activities draw families into the program, which relies on a variety of strategies designed to enhance children's reading skills and comprehension.

The school also has begun Friday Afternoon Clubs, in which children have identified things they want to learn and do that may not be included in daily classroom activities. Each class lasts for six weeks, includes 10-12 children of different ages and grade levels, and is facilitated by a teacher, an aide, or a community member. Clubs include crafts, needlework, dancing, Native American culture and traditions, hands-on computer, science, health, drama, sports, games, and art.

Meeks notes that the clubs address student-identified activities that promote health and well-being as well as a variety of learning styles. "When you put an overlay of the multiple intelligences on this, you've really addressed them all," she says. "And it came from the students. They created it. It's another example of being child-centered. If you want to meet the needs of children, you have to ask them what those needs are."

CREATING A PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILIES

Highway 93—a long and winding road with equally long stretches of straightaways that disappear into the horizon—cuts a path north from Missoula through the Mission Valley. At times, the mostly two-lane road climbs so long and so steep that it seems flat has been left behind forever. Then presto! Another high plain where the morning fog lies on rangeland like a lace comforter while the sun warms the tallest peaks in the Mission Mountain Range. And the sky is bigger than God.

Polson snuggles the south shore of Flathead Lake, a 27-mile long stretch of blue and the largest natural freshwater lake west of the Mississippi River. The city is the largest on the Flathead Indian

PRINCIPLES AND PHILOSOPHY DETAIL LITERACY APPROACH

CHERRY VALLEY SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

We believe learning is a process that begins at birth and is lifelong. Consideration of equity and diversity are a basis for ensuring success for all students. Varying social contexts allow children to purposefully select, interpret, and integrate information about their world. All students are expected to become confident, resourceful, disciplined, and self-motivated learners. Responsibility to self and community are emphasized.

Meaningful acquisition and application of content knowledge and process skills is achieved through problem solving, critical thinking, decisionmaking, and creativity. There are opportunities for student choice and time for discovery learning with student experience being central to instruction.

Literacy is the primary and most essential goal for all students. Literacy is defined as proficiency in not only the written and spoken word, but also includes numeracy, the arts, and emotions. The curriculum is presented in an integrated format respectful of individual learning styles and abilities. Flexible groupings are based on the nature of the activity and varying rates of growth and development of individual children.

Learning occurs most effectively in a culture that is safe and nurturing. School personnel, parents, and the community share the responsibility to work together to provide a positive school environment.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

- The best interests of the child are the basis of all decisions and actions (child-centered)
- Each child's learning potential is recognized, with the belief that all children can learn
- The child is not viewed in isolation, but as part of a family which influences their learning
- The environment that the school provides is safe, nurturing, and one in which all children can be successful
- The school is an inclusive community where each individual is valued and has access to all aspects of the school program
- Team process is part of effective decisionmaking
- Instructional practices are guided by a research-based shared philosophy which reflects current best practices (personal and in the literature)
- All certified staff have the responsibility to engage in self-reflection and professional development to improve and expand their skills and knowledge; the principal has the responsibility to support teachers in meeting their need for professional development

Carew, a licensed clinical social worker and counselor, to direct the partnership.

The project also has provided staff development to meet the growing list of teacher-identified concerns and responsibilities. Courses include addressing fetal alcohol syndrome, identifying and reporting child abuse, understanding the historic conflicts between public education and Native Americans, working with children who have attention deficit disorder, and using art therapy techniques.

Teachers are a main referral source when children appear to be having difficulties that go beyond the classroom. "We live in a small community—a rural area—and there's a lot of pride," says Carew. "So the chances of people coming forward for help are slim. We identify children's needs through the teachers."

Carew also visits families in their homes, helps them identify needs, and offers positive parenting tips. "My role is to approach families in a very soft way and suggest that there are services that could help them and their child," she says. "I meet with children and families and try to connect them with available resources. If no resources are available, then I can work with them as a counselor."

Carew says that one of the most beneficial components of the Polson Partnership has been its family involvement activities. "There's so much research that shows that when you increase parental involvement in the schools, you increase the possibility of academic success for the children," she says. "We need the entire family to support the children and each other."

At one of its first family-enrichment nights—Play-Doh making for kindergartners—150 families showed up. "We realized that we were onto something really wonderful," Carew says. Other family-oriented activities have included noncompetitive math and science games, literacy fairs, hands-on computer night, and a schoolwide picnic. The activities have drawn between 30 and 100 families. "We've really found that the children's excitement inspires the parents," Carew notes.

Since its inception in 1993, the Polson Partnership has:

- Developed a risk assessment that focuses on the social and emotional well-being of the child and parent
- Organized cultural enrichment activities in the curriculum
- Developed and implemented the Kootenai Indian language program for all kindergarten and first-grade classes
- Provided districtwide teacher training and consultation

- Provided individual and family counseling when no other resources were available
- Established a student self-esteem mentoring program
- Established a parent education and family enrichment program

BRINGING THE THEORIES TO LIFE

Educational theory comes to life in Doug Crosby's first-grade classroom.

It's a world where research is practiced, where learning focuses on the needs of individual children, and where students are engaged in hands-on activities. Crosby teaches children individually, in small groups, and together as a class while providing interactive group activities.

His is a child-centered class where individual children learn cooperatively and progress at a rate that is comfortable and challenging for each of them. Don't look for basal readers or packaged lesson plans in Crosby's classroom. Instead, children select reading materials from color-coded buckets of books, based on their levels of expertise and comfort. They write stories about their own experiences and illustrate them with their own drawings. Their progress is charted weekly in individual graphs and in detailed personal notes maintained by Crosby.

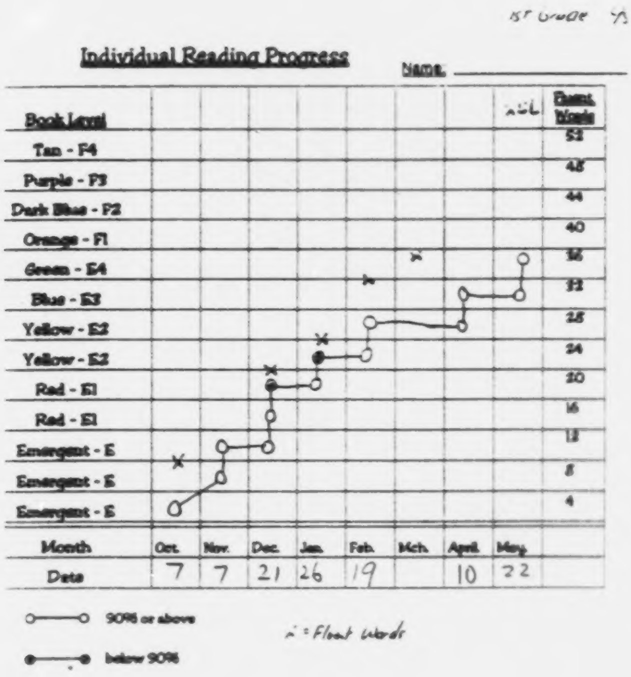
"What we're doing is an individual educational plan for every child," notes Crosby, a native of New Zealand who taught for six years in his homeland before settling in at Cherry Valley School three years ago. "My basic philosophy on reading and writing," Crosby says, "is that I teach reading through reading. I teach writing through writing."

This basic approach shows in Crosby's classroom, where children's literature is prominently displayed. In just the second week of classes, students read aloud to each other or silently. They write and illustrate their own stories. And they share their work with their classmates during Author's Chair.

In a typical day, Crosby meets in semiformal conferences with each child one or two times. They discuss the child's writing and reading as Crosby nudges students from random letter patterns to whole words to sentences and more complex ideas.

"In a developmentally appropriate classroom," Crosby says, "kids write from their own experiences and at their own levels. Each conference I have with a child is different. One child might be using random letters while another is writing stories. The key is that the kids work at their own levels, and I work with them."

Crosby embodies Cherry Val-



Crosby charts the reading progress of each student individually.

ley's commitment to developing reading, writing, and listening skills. If children have a solid foundation in literacy and language, Crosby says, they will have a better chance at success throughout their school years.

"If we can get the kids on track with their reading, writing, and listening, then everything else will fall into place," he maintains. "The core problems that children have come from an inability to read and write. If children can't read the math problems, then they can't do the math problems. It's not a problem with math that they have; it's a problem with reading."

Crosby says that discipline is rarely a problem in a classroom where children are challenged at their individual levels and encouraged to progress in a timely manner. "When kids are challenged, they're interested in learning. And when they're interested in learning, you don't have the discipline problems you have when kids are bored."

The conventions of reading and writing are not lost in Crosby's literacy-rich classroom, either. Each day, children follow a five-step activity plan that includes spelling, handwriting, choosing and reading a take-home book, writing and publishing, and an activity called SQUIRT (super quiet, uninterrupted, independent reading time). Students select the order in which they will pursue their activities and work individually, with another student, or in small groups. Crosby also meets individually with students who read with him, go over spelling words, and review written work.

While most spelling is learned in the context of reading and writing, the school has identified 230 essential words that all students are expected to learn by the third grade. Each week, first-grade students take home three new words to learn, with at least one of them selected from their own writing. The number of words students are expected to learn increases as they advance through the grades.

Each day, children also choose a book to take home in their Cherry Valley book bags, which were custom-made by middle and high school home economics students. Children read their book to parents or other family members, who then write comments about the story and the child's reading. "The book bag, in and of itself, is one of the most important things we do to foster parental involvement," says Meeks. "They go home every night and create a strong connection to the school."

Parents and other volunteers also flow freely into classes at Cherry Valley. The school invites community members to work with students as reading buddies. "I feel really fortunate to be able to give something back to the school," says parent Judy Carte, whose daughter is in second grade this year. "Volunteering gives me an appreciation for what teachers do and all they offer children. Another gratifying thing is that when I come into this school, all these little kids come up and give me a hug and say, 'Hi, Judy.' It's just very rewarding."

For Principal Meeks, the mission of Cherry Valley School is to meet the growing needs of children and help them develop into lifelong learners. "Our job," she says, "is to take children from one level of knowledge to the next. We do that at Cherry Valley by knowing our children and their needs."

RESOURCE NOTES: For more detailed discussions about Cherry Valley School, see Building Equity in Early Literacy: Two Case Studies on Improving the School Literacy Program, *by Dr. Jane Braunger. The publication is available from NWREL by calling Linda Revels at (503) 275-9519.* ■

Know you what it is to be a child?
It is to believe in belief; it is to be so
little that the elves can reach to whisper
in your ear; it is to turn pumpkins into
coaches; and mice into horses; lowness
into loftiness and nothing into everything,
for each child has its fairy godmother in its soul.
—Francis Thompson, 1908

'A School in Heaven for Kids'

Mary Harrison Primary School Builds Changes Around Families In Rural Toledo, Oregon

STORY BY SHANNON PRIEM

PHOTOS BY TONY KNEIDEK

Notice how Tovee Rowley hops off the school bus and you'll see the power of absolute belief.

She can't wait to explore, to create, and to navigate the world around her. When Mom comes to visit, the second-grader rushes to share her poem on hamsters. It's a wonderful poem. No need to worry about the spelling…not yet.

Sometimes Tovee needs to slow down a bit. But there's no need to worry much about that, either. After all, it's in her nature to boldly create, learn, and seek approval. At Tovee's age, experts say, children are as vulnerable as they are confident and invincible.

Mary Harrison Primary School has restructured itself around this belief. Just as important, teachers, administrators, and others believe that every child can learn, and every child has a unique ability or strength. Their jobs are to find and nurture it.

Mary Harrison is a close-knit school of 250 children in Toledo, Oregon, a rural community nestled in the Coast Range about seven miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. More than 50 percent of the children's families have incomes below the poverty level in a town that relies on fishing and a dwindling timber economy for its livelihood.

Until 1988, Mary Harrison provided a traditional education in which children sat in neat rows and progressed through age-specific grades. Teachers lectured. Parents dropped their kids off, then went home. A few came in to help.

Then the school cracked open a new book and started to redecorate.

Gone are the rows of desks. Every class is a colorful cluster of things to touch, marvel at, hear, and count. Children huddle in groups. Ages don't matter much, but learning styles and levels do. Children and classrooms tend to be noisy. And finding the teacher is like searching for Waldo. (Try looking near the floor in a cluster of children.)

Mary Harrison was among the first Oregon primary schools to embrace the critical mass of early childhood research that advocated developmentally appropriate, child-centered education. The school became part of a NWREL pilot on school-based early childhood centers that began in 1988. Today, the school is among 10 in the United States being considered as a national model for Right From the Start, a project by the Childcare Action Campaign of New York.

At first, parent concerns presented obstacles (don't experiment on my kid!), and this year, larger class sizes and funding issues challenge staff. However, staff commitment to the school's shared vision of "what is best for kids" keeps the restructuring on track, along with support from Principal Barbara Fields, who was chosen 1996 Administrator of the Year for Lincoln County School District.

The transformation, though,

began under former Principal Anita McClanahan. She and her staff took to heart findings from *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age Eight*, a publication of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). McClanahan and her staff recognized the need for Mary Harrison to change to a family-centered approach to create a more meaningful learning environment for children.

Sharing the Vision

Staff spent months crafting a shared vision statement and restructuring plan. Educating teachers to integrate the recommendations in the NAEYC report became a priority. Last year, the school negotiated early release days for collaborative planning with neighboring schools to improve transition and identify curriculum gaps and duplications.

Using NAEYC work as a study guide, teachers at Mary Harrison evaluated their own curriculum, dovetailing in developmentally appropriate practices such as whole language instruction and cooperative learning. In fact, certified and classified staff alike took the 10-week course on cooperative learning, and no one missed a class, McClanahan says. Original restructuring goals were:

- Providing a developmentally appropriate program that recog-

nized the individual learning needs of children by creating ungraded classrooms

- Developing school/family partnerships to support learning

DAP began schoolwide in 1989, multiage classrooms in 1991. Today, all first- and second-grade classrooms are multiage, and some kindergarten children are included in language arts and shared reading.

Honor Differences

In Karen Johnson's multiage (first- and second-grade) classroom, younger children often benefit from the experience and wisdom of older children. When a six-year-old student struggled with a math problem recently, his seven-year-old workmate offered reassurance. "That's okay," he told his friend. "I didn't know how to do that last year, either."

"You didn't?" the six-year-old asked, astonished and relieved to hear that learning is an ongoing process.

In a multiage classroom, students not only learn from each other, they also gain confidence and perspective. "When you can't tell the difference between a first- and second-grader, the method is working," says Johnson. "You have to honor differences and teach in flexible groups." For example, she uses open-ended reading and writing assignments, which help kids advance at their own levels.

When Mary Harrison began its

Reaching Children Where They Are

A new school—despite the colorful whales on the wall and a smiling teacher kneeling at eye level—can terrify even the happiest five-year-old.

It can make her want to crawl on the counter and press her face against the window.

It can make a worried parent linger by the door.

It can leave a lasting first impression of fear . . . not good for the first day of school.

At Mary Harrison Primary School, classroom doors are seldom closed and parents are never strangers. Chances are, when kindergarten students begin school, they already have new friends. They've met the teacher, the secretary, and the custodian. They know where the bathrooms are. Parents know the ropes, too. But that doesn't happen by chance.

"We plan, meet, and work at it every day," says Principal Barbara Fields. The school, Fields notes, is a spoke in a bigger wheel that uses several programs to ease the transition from home to school and from "little" school to "bigger" school.

The transition team at Mary Harrison began as a collaborative project with the local Head Start program three years ago. The team includes staff, parents, and district and social service representatives. They meet monthly to discuss specific family and school issues, making sure teachers share insights as children move from preschool to different grade levels to the next school.

As a result of early efforts in 1993, several community businesses and agencies helped bring families in by sponsoring an immunization clinic at the school. And in 1994-95, the group received an Oregon Department of Education grant to expand services to include all new students, preschools, and daycare providers.

Mary Harrison's goal is to have knowledgeable families that feel comfortable in seeking information, and staff that is familiar with the unique needs of each incoming child and family. The process reflects months of schoolwide discussions and "learning by doing."

For instance, teachers provide a "familiar greeter" service to help parents feel comfortable entering the school. "It's amazing that when parents come in, they light up when they see a familiar face from last year," says teacher Karen Johnson. "Transition isn't easy for anyone."

The process for a newcomer begins with personal contact at the school and a questionnaire that allows the family to offer information they feel comfortable volunteering. From there, the process varies to meet the different needs of families.

Mary Harrison offers spring tours for kindergarten students, work parties for parents, an introductory video, and new-student orientations. Staff from Mary Harrison and Arcadia Intermediate also meet monthly to help families and staff bridge the gap between second and third grade.

Fields says it is important to accommodate the various lifestyles, schedules, and situations of families in creative and obliging ways.

"We've learned that family involvement is different for everyone," she says. "There is no such thing as a typical family in our school."

—Shannon Priem

early childhood program. It also implemented a schoolwide thematic approach to curriculum. In autumn, students and teachers focused on relationships to look at how people relate to each other in communities and as friends or family members. Units culminated in family celebrations such as a holiday open house and multicultural fair. Later, this approach became more individualized within classrooms. Teachers now use both approaches to integrate math, language, and social sciences.

Children are actively involved in learning and decisionmaking. During part of the day, children learn in work centers of their own choosing. Students create classroom rules and jobs. To learn how to resolve conflicts peacefully, children role-play situations and reach solutions. And, they are responsible for keeping their rooms tidy.

This year, student portfolios are a major part of assessment, Fields says. Some teachers use student-led conferences, and parents track progress by noting in writing or on forms their child's growth as a reader and writer. Standardized tests are not given until the beginning of third grade.

"We aren't too concerned with standardized tests early on," says Fields. "Our primary concern at this age is to help children learn to become learners."

Other elements of Mary Harrison's child-centered school include:

- Reading Recovery, a program that provides one-on-one daily assistance to first-graders who are struggling with reading
- A formal transition team to bridge the gaps among levels, other schools, and home (see story, page 19)
- A schoolwide Title I program
- A state-funded Head Start program in a nearby building
- A family advocate staff member who coordinates transition efforts of Head Start families
- Health screenings for vision, hearing, and dental
- Parent education programs
- A conflict resolution curriculum

Fields says that parents and other family members are expected to be involved in their children's learning in routine and meaningful ways. "Every single adult is responsible for building on the positive," she says. "We ask ourselves and our families, 'How do we talk to kids? What behaviors are we modeling?'"

It Feels Like Home

To parents, the nurturing, open atmosphere is evident.

"This place feels like home," says Linda Rowley, Tovee's mother, who also is a parent volunteer and school bus driver. The school has helped Rowley and her daughter from the start, recognizing Rowley's challenges as a single parent and caregiver of her own mother. She's become one of the school's most active supporters and volunteers.

"It's a very caring place; they want you here," she says, walking into her daughter's classroom. Rowley sits on the floor with Tovee and friends around her to read. It's a nice break for Tovee's teacher, Karin Dunaway, who needs to arrange the mid-morning snack donated by parents. "You can't put your finger on it, but as a parent I noticed it, and now as a teacher it's obvious," Dunaway says. "We all care about each other."

Adds parent volunteer coordinator Kristy Norman, "There aren't places you can't go here; they never ask you why you're here. We all belong."

In fact, Norman says, there are always adults looking out for children in the school. "When a child comes out of the bathroom," she notes with a laugh, "some adult will usually ask, 'Did you flush?'"

Early Challenges

"In the beginning we faced times of critical change," McClanahan recalls. "I had just read the NAEYC work on developmentally appropriate practices and immediately said, 'Yes.' It fed my passion for children, especially at Mary Harrison, where 75 percent of our families were low income. We had to fundamentally change by teaching children not just at school, but in the context of their families."

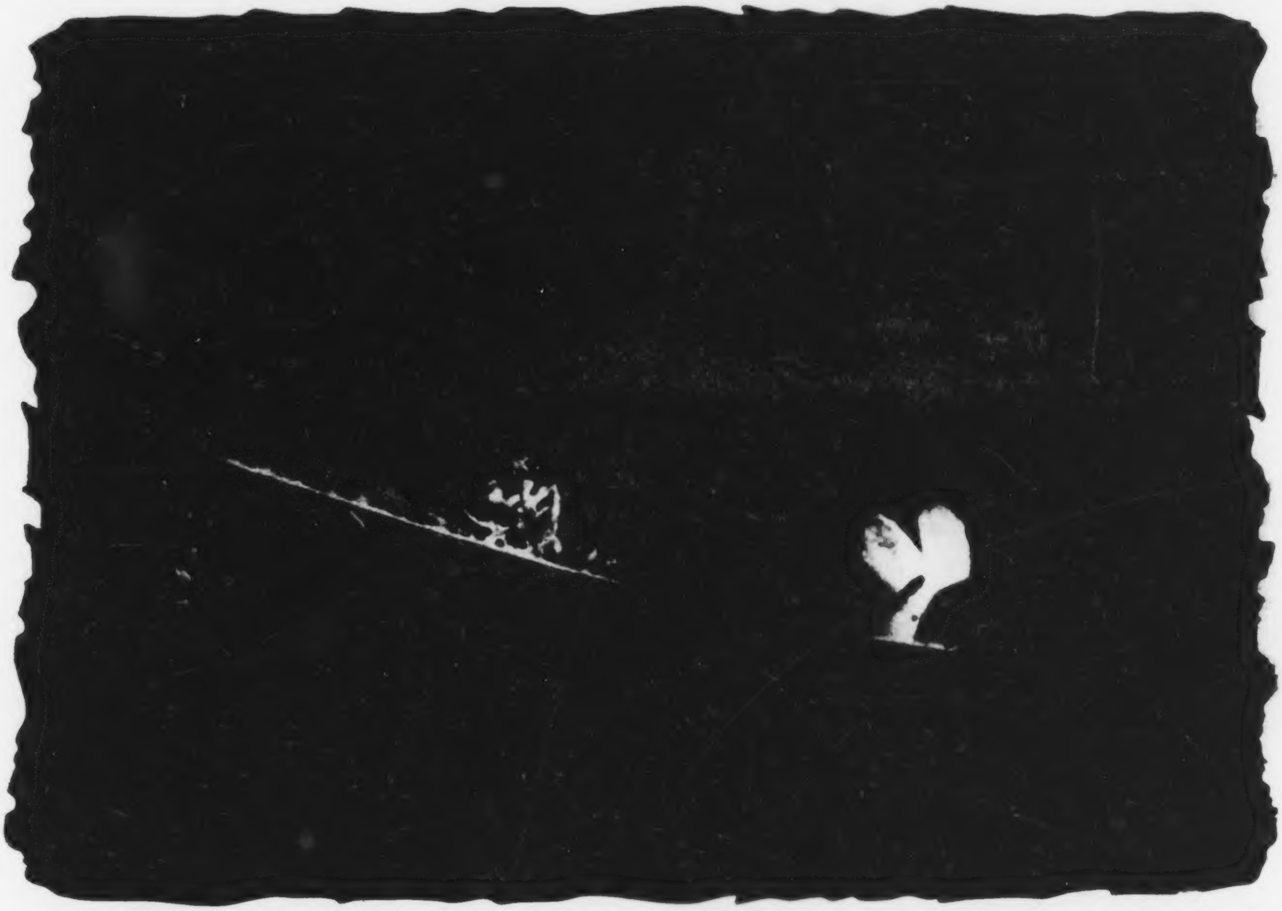
McClanahan, who now directs the Oregon Department of Education's early childhood program, says it has been rewarding to watch Mary Harrison School evolve and mature. "You have master teachers at Mary Harrison," McClanahan says.

"A deep commitment and shared vision is behind their success. They are close to my heart. I know they're clinging to what they believe, and that will sustain them as we move toward new challenges such as funding and state assessment standards. The bottom line is that they will do what's best for young children."

Recognizing the key role of families early on, Mary Harrison began making home visits in 1989. In teams of two, teachers reached 75 percent of Mary Harrison families at home to identify the unique strengths and goals of each child. The remaining 25 percent met with teachers in restaurants or at school. It was the parents' choice.

"We sadly realized that many of our families didn't even know what their own children's strengths were," McClanahan says. School staff persisted, conducting open houses, tours, surveys, and phone calls to encourage parents to take an active role in the school and their children's education. The following year, 98 percent of the parents invited teachers into their homes.

As a result of the school's reaching out, parental involvement increased dramatically. Some parents found themselves in the school for the first time. Many



others had attended Mary Harrison, but had had little or no contact with the school since childhood. While funding problems and larger class sizes slowed the program, informal outreach continues with school potlucks, work parties, and a new student orientation program. Weekly teacher newsletters help keep families informed about class activities and learning strategies. Teachers also share the lyrics to songs children are learning and offer examples of children's work.

Sustaining Beliefs

"We work as a team in everything we do," Fields says. "Helping children in transition, which is a major challenge for this age, doesn't come naturally. We work at it constantly." Early-release days also allow staff to plan collaboratively and to work with staff at Arcadia Intermediate School, a neighboring school that children from Mary Harrison attend for third through fifth grade.

Fields notes that strong support from district administration is critical when schools are planning and implementing widespread changes. "Our administration believes in school-based improvements and has given us the freedom we need," she says.

Fields also says that school leaders must embrace a clear vision that transcends the day-to-day and year-to-year difficulties that education faces. "My personal belief, regardless of funding problems, is that each child is gifted in some way and that we can improve their education," she says.

Then, with a smile, Fields adds, "If there's a school in heaven for kids, I hope it's like Mary Harrison."

Shannon Priem is a freelance writer based in Vancouver, Washington. ■

SMOOTHING ROUGH EDGES IN CONCRETE

A rural Washington community looks to multiage classrooms as a foundation for continuous learning

By MARDI BERKHOUSE JONES

It's 7:55 on a Monday morning in Concrete, Washington, and for the next 10 minutes, organized chaos reigns as hefty yellow school buses lumber to the curb, huff to a halt, and unload their young cargo. Brightly clad children, hugging notebooks and backpacks, scamper in a hundred different directions, a scene that repeats itself daily in schoolyards across the country.

But at Concrete Elementary School, high in the Cascade Mountains of Northern Washington, children are scurrying to a different kind of classroom. Here, family groups replace the traditional, single-grade, age-specific classroom. Instead of plodding through a rigid, chronological program, students work at levels that match their abilities. They progress through a curriculum that keeps pace with their capabilities, and learn together over a span of age and grade levels.

"This is a kid-driven program," explains Concrete Principal Loren Fitting. "With our present continuous-progress format, we honestly look at the needs of each student. Our curriculum is in the student that walks through the door—it is not driven by a set of contrived expectations."

In this small community, where children are as familiar with bald eagles soaring over the snow-capped alps as they are with the salmon that flash through the emerald-green Skagit River, change does not come easy. In the late 1980s, the area's timber-based economy was reeling from severe cutbacks. Families found themselves scrambling to find new ways to survive in an unfamiliar economy.

But on the cusp of a new century, and with a dramatically different world only a heartbeat away, staff also believed that change was necessary.

Now, six years later, Concrete children eagerly slip into seats at family-group tables. They work in teams to build toothpick bridges or to add the final touches to a class newspaper. Teachers structure and adjust the curriculum to allow children to progress at a rate compatible with their abilities. By grouping children this way, it is possible for teachers to use strategies that will be more responsive to the individual needs of children. The basic goal of Concrete Elementary School's Continuous Progress Program is to nurture the diversity and growth of children's knowledge by removing artificial barriers.

Students learn not by lecture and rote, but through their own active involvement and participation in the education process. In short, they learn by doing, and they love it.

It shows in the enthusiasm of children in Deborah Riehl's first- and second-grade family group as they map a plan for cooperative-learning projects. Students have designated project-group names and created hand signals to indicate when a classmate gets stuck.

"One finger means help," explains Brice, a seven-year-old senior member of the class. "If someone needs help—like they crash into a word that they don't understand—then they raise one finger and I help them sound out the word. It's fun when I can help the little kids."

Team projects include publishing books, producing plays, and creating theme posters. The process fits well into Concrete's Continuous Progress Program, which focuses on kids learning together cooperatively.

Starting Small, Building a Base

In 1989, Concrete Elementary teachers, supported by a grant from the Washington Department of Education's Schools for the 21st Century program, began forging a program that would meet the needs of all students while allowing them to proceed at their own rates. Concrete staff invited community members to get involved by serving on several committees that reviewed effective-schools research and discussed school improvement in Concrete. Teachers and parents fanned out across Washington and British Columbia to observe existing programs and visit other schools that employed multiage strategies. While they did not find a template for change, the parents and teachers did gain enough information to develop a greater understanding of the nongraded format. From these site visits and research, a continuous-progress blueprint began to emerge at Concrete.

For staff at Concrete Elementary, change meant taking chances. Revamping the entire educational structure that had been in place for years was risky. Initially, 12 teachers mapped out a plan and began laying a foundation of teamwork and trust. Their recommendations were based on the comfort level of individual teachers as well as meeting student needs and providing varied educational settings. Based on those considerations, teachers decided on three basic strategies that would drive their school improvement efforts: multiage classrooms, team teaching, and cooperative learning.

"First and foremost, multiage is the vehicle we use to achieve our continuous-progress goals," explains Fitting. "This concept has many facets, but it is based on the idea that a child will be with one teacher for more than one year. This type of grouping allows flexibility in the placing of older children according to need, ability, or interest—not just by age or grade-level restrictions."

Children at Concrete progress at their own rates in family groups that may contain one, two, or three grade levels. Classrooms are built around learning structures that support each child as she strives to acquire and apply new skills and knowledge. At the beginning of the year, students begin at a variety of learning levels.

"Our continuous-progress vision does not contain the student to any grade-level barrier," says Fitting. "The children proceed wherever they are on their educational journeys. This is truly an individual approach to learning."

Another advantage of the multiage format is the role-modeling aspect. Students pair up in class or work in small, cooperative groups. Older kids know the ropes and can serve as a support system to new students. Older kids also work as mentors in helping skill development. Fitting sees social as well as academic benefits. "From a social perspective," he says, "friends are not restricted to one grade level. Suddenly, friends come in all ages and abilities."

Teachers at Concrete Elementary use a variety of instructional strategies including cooperative learning, team teaching, and cross-age tutoring. The curriculum offers practical, hands-on experiences in all academic areas. Major instructional units are designed around thematic concepts. Subject areas are integrated to provide meaningful learning activities for the children. Many classes use activity centers that address the various ways individual students learn.

"We look at education through very contemporary eyes," says Fitting. "For example, we use a project-oriented curriculum. Students are able to speak, write well, work well in cooperative learning settings, and experience the positive rewards of successfully completing projects individually and in groups. This creates an academically well-rounded child."

Student assessment is visible and ongoing. Portfolios travel with the student, so each teacher knows the progress being made. This assessment process emphasizes the teacher's responsibility to share and interpret information for the child and the parents. Accountability is high and individualized.

Fitting says the multiage philosophy is also a good vehicle for staff development. "The concept lends itself to growth and vision, and creates—in the long run—a self-renewing school," he says.

"We are always reinventing ourselves," Fitting adds. "Therefore, we cannot become stagnant. Multiage keeps us constantly planning for the future."

Staff members meet weekly to fine-tune program concepts or address unexpected issues that arise. Retreats, informal get-togethers, and brainstorming all contribute to the successful delivery of the program. Planning times are scheduled with teachers from other family groups to ensure peer interaction.

Communication Key to Easing Transitions

There were a few bumps in the road while Concrete paved the way to its school improvement effort. Some parents were uneasy with multiage classrooms, and some teachers became advocates for one program over another.

Clear communication between the school and the community is extremely important, notes Fitting. Throughout the planning process, the school board, administrators, and teachers invited and encouraged community involvement. The open process helped to shape the program and provide options for parents. For example, while the original design called for all multiage classes in the school, some parents wanted a traditional classroom. As a result, school staff decided to offer a traditional class at each grade level. Parents are now asked their preferences at the end of each school year and given the choice of a multiage or traditional class for their children. Currently, about 66 percent of the students are in multiage classes.

"We need to realize the differences in each classroom setting," says teacher Ruth Ann Brokke. "We need to recognize different teaching styles and celebrate the varied teaching philosophies. We all have so much to contribute. Communication with teachers and the community is so vital. We must always keep those lines open to be successful."

Fitting and his staff have also integrated a "step-up" program that has eased student transitions. One day each spring, students moving on to a new family group go to their new rooms to meet the teachers and familiarize themselves with the new classes.

The biggest changes over the past six years have taken place at the kindergarten and sixth-grade levels. "These areas did not carry through in the original continuous-progress model," Fitting says. "This year we have introduced a K-1 class and a five-six family group. We felt this was necessary. The K-1 configuration brings children into the program early on. And from an educational point of view, it makes sense—kindergart-

See CONCRETE, Page 29

Family-Focused Preschool

Tiny Elma School District offers birth-to-kindergarten services in hopes of starting families on an education-first course

Story and photos by MELISSA STEINEGER

Five-year-old Tasha Erickson's blond ponytail swings side-to-side as she bounces resolutely to the bulletin board and points to the list of the day's activities. "It's not time to play," she announces sternly. "It's time to go outside."

Tasha, a serious tyke in a Barney T-shirt, is a two-year veteran of the developmentally focused preschool offered by the Elma School District. She knows how to check and interpret the day's posted schedule, which consists of drawings of each activity along with a written label.

"You're right," says teacher Tarrie Bracey in a voice brimming with affirmation. "But today we finished a little early so we're waiting just a few minutes to go outside. Thank you for knowing our schedule."

Tasha's eyes glow and the corners of her mouth lift slightly. Satisfied, the youngster plunges into the tumble of three-, four-, and five-year-olds busily assembling blocks.

The Elma School District serves 2,100 students in three buildings nestled at the foot of Washington's Olympic Peninsula. For more than a decade, Elma has offered a birth-to-kindergarten program for youngsters who are identified as developmentally delayed—defined as anything from speech disorders to Down syndrome. About five years ago, when many schools began integrating developmentally delayed children into mainstream classrooms, Elma did likewise. That meant opening the birth-to-kindergarten program to all children.

Preschool class sizes range from 10 to 14 children, and teachers are assisted by a classroom aide with early childhood education training. The program's three teachers hold endorsements in early childhood education and are members of the bargaining unit that represents teachers in the Elma School District. Parent volunteers also are common in preschool classrooms and this year the district finished a 3,300 square-foot building designed especially and exclusively for preschoolers.

Family focus is the mantra of the birth-to-kindergarten program. Services are free to families who meet state low-income guidelines and to developmentally delayed youngsters; others pay up to $40 a month on a sliding scale. Elma's program can serve about 100 youngsters, a fourth to a third of whom are developmentally delayed. (At any time, another 20 or so children are on a waiting list.) Children come one to four times a week depending on their ages. On Fridays, teachers make home visits.

Ostensibly, home visits are to describe a child's progress, exchange ideas, and discuss concerns. But teachers also act as a source of information and provide referrals to social service agencies.

Dr. Carole Cropley, a teacher in the preschool program, says that families in distress often find it difficult to give their child's education the attention it needs. "Until families have food and shelter covered," she says, "how can they think about education? We often get to my agenda faster if we get to their agenda first."

Home visits also help form a crucial bond between family and school. "Parents may have unpleasant memories of their own school experiences," says teacher Linda Ferguson. "Our home visits build a relationship that may have benefits now, in kindergarten, in fourth grade, in middle school—maybe forever."

The family-school bond is further strengthened by encouraging parents to volunteer in the classroom and to visit often. Youngsters take home a monthly calendar of events and a newsletter that features notes about classroom activities along with general parenting information. Parents also meet with teachers at the school for conferences and for "family socials," gatherings to allow families to exchange experiences, sample preschool activities, and learn parenting tips.

Carolyn Wescott, a mother of four children younger than six, has a son in his second year at the Elma preschool. "I brought Jenner in for a screening when he was three because he wasn't talking yet—I thought he might have a hearing problem," Wescott says. "The teacher who screened him was wonderful. She took all kinds of time to find out what was going on." Jenner joined the preschool in midyear. After several months in school, along with other changes at home, he has been transformed into an outgoing, talkative child.

"I think the preschool is wonderful and I especially enjoy the home visits," says Wescott. "I get to 'interrogate'—I mean that in a nice way—the teacher. I get her professional input on my mothering—how I can do things better, what she thinks about things I'm reading. I really enjoy my one-to-one time with her. I'd feel lost if she didn't come out."

Effects of the inclusive preschool are rippling through Elma's single elementary school. Leslie Wheeler, a teacher for 15 years, served in the preschool program before becoming a teacher in a blended classroom. (In Elma, an elementary teacher teaches the same group of youngsters for first and second grade, further strengthening the child's bond with school and the family's bond with Elma.)

As the first batch of integrated preschool "graduates" entered elementary school, Wheeler recalls, they were bored. Accustomed to a hands-on curriculum that emphasized multiple activity stations keyed to their developmental stages, the youngsters were not content, as Wheeler puts it, to color dittos.

The district responded by providing teacher training in High/Scope, a child-centered curriculum emphasizing developmentally appropriate, hands-on learning. Formerly available for only the preschool level, High/Scope has recently expanded its strategies and concepts through third grade.

Where preschoolers may learn sorting skills at an activity center—a table with blocks and other resources appropriate for learning the skill—older children have activity centers for reading, writing, art, math, computers, and science. They learn to "plan, do, and review" their learning process themselves, with support from the teacher. At the writing center, a high-capability child might write a six-page story while a developmentally delayed child draws the alphabet. Both are working to their maximum potential instead of an artificial average that doesn't challenge the more advanced youngster and unfairly frustrates the child at the other end of the spectrum.

The voluntary High/Scope curriculum training for teachers through second grade is proving successful, says Kathy Budge, Director of Instruction, because teachers see that the concepts work. "Things that teachers and community say are important—problem solving, reasoning, the ability to 'plan-do-review'—these are the things that have been part of a high-quality preschool curriculum," she says. "Now we're moving those things up the curriculum to older children."

In an era of continual reductions in state and federal dollars, one might well ask why Elma does it—and how. Finding money to pay for nonmandatory programs is increasingly difficult. Elma pays for its variety of birth-to-kindergarten services with a creative combination of federal and state dollars and tuition charges. Of a total program cost of about $212,000, a federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act grant covers about $23,000, state dollars earmarked for children with special needs another $166,000, state Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program funds add $12,500, and tuition contributes $10,500.

Nell Ellingsen, Director of Special Services, oversees the district's early childhood program. Ellingsen believes that educating community members is crucial for a successful program. Residents, she says, need to know the research concerning preschool education and its effect on the lifelong school career of youngsters; they need to know about the needs of families and children in their district for affordable, high-quality early childhood education; and they need to understand how a strong bond with the school, established early, affects the lifelong education of the child.

"As educators," Ellingsen says, "we have to educate our communities on the importance of early childhood education. We believe in the power of connecting families to resources—parents bonding with children and parents believing that they are the greatest educators their children will ever have. This is our mission. Although it does take more effort to find the dollars to support the program, we could not allow a lack of funds to be our rationale for dropping it."

Linda Fitzgerald, a lifelong community resident and school board member since 1990, works with families of at-risk adolescents. "It's clear that the earlier the intervention with families who have risk factors—the sooner you get them accessing the resources available to them—the more successful they are," she says. "A lot of families don't know what resources are available. They need an advocate who can help them access the services that will help them be successful. The preschool teacher is that advocate. The teacher helps empower the family, and that helps them succeed. When I'm out in the community, parents often tell me what a wonderful program it is."

While quantifiable measurements of the program's success have not been undertaken, teachers and parents have no doubt of its benefits. Anecdotal results include:

- Teachers report that parents uniformly say their children have reached the individual goals set at the beginning of each year by teachers and parents.
- Families build sometimes surprising relationships with the school. One mother recently confided that she used to become physically ill when she had to visit the school. After two years of experience with the home visits and family focus of Elma's program, however, she returned to school herself and earned a teaching certificate.
- Elementary teachers say that youngsters from the preschool are ahead of their peers in basic school abilities—like little Tasha who knows the day's schedule and how to keep to it.

"We believe in the power of connecting families to resources—parents bonding with children and parents believing that they are the greatest educators their children will ever have. This is our mission."

"We offer preschool because we know it can make a difference for children," Ellingsen says. "Research substantiates that the greatest difference we can make for a child is in the developmental years."

Getting children started early can set them on a path of lifelong learning, she adds. "If we don't permit our children to learn at the earliest possible time, we won't be able to do what we're required to do at a later age," Ellingsen says. "The fact that as a district you're losing federal and state money can't be an excuse. If I ever doubted that, all I would need to do is just visit the preschool classroom and watch those children becoming excited about learning."

RESOURCE NOTES: Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children, *and* Years of Promise: A Comprehensive Learning Strategy for America's Children, *are both available from the Carnegie Corporation, (212) 207-6285. For information on High/Scope curriculum resources, call (313) 485-2000.*

Melissa Steineger is a freelance writer living in Portland, Oregon. ■

CONCRETE

Continued from page 25

ners can use first-graders as role models. They see their mentors making the jump to literacy."

The other major change in the original concept was to use "looping" at the first- and second-grade levels. Looping involves two teachers working together while maintaining separate classrooms. At Concrete, Hallie Elms and Marilyn Lane teach first and second grade. Year one finds Elms teaching all first-graders and Lane all second-graders. In year two, Elms continues with her class, now second-graders. Lane's second-graders move on to other classrooms, and she takes on a new group of first-graders who she will teach for two years.

By looping, Lane and Elms teach one grade level and still offer the students a blend that touches on the multiage concept through cooperative planning. Lane and Elms also join their classes for some small- and large-group activities. This gives the children the opportunity to work on cooperative skills and mentoring.

Experts point to many advantages to teaching a group of students for more than one year. Dr. Glenellen Pace, an educational researcher and associate professor of language and literacy at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, cites several benefits, including:

- A well-functioning learning community is established during the first year
- Returning children are familiar with classroom expectations and ready to learn when a new school year begins
- New children entering the classroom are brought on board by experienced students
- Effective communication with parents, nurtured over time, makes for stronger home-school connections
- Teachers develop a better knowledge and understanding of each child's strengths, dreams, and needs
- The stability of one teacher and a relatively unchanged classroom community may be especially important for children who, for a variety of reasons, lead disruptive, insecure lives outside of school

Thoughtful Deliberation Leads Way to Change

Years of planning and study went into Concrete's design, and school personnel are careful to keep the program fluid and dynamic to meet the needs of students, teachers, and parents.

Teachers, administrators, parents, students, and others in the community feel they have benefited from the program. A community survey this year indicated widespread acceptance and support. "The community indicated to us that they like the concept of the diversity of classroom configurations being offered," notes Superintendent Gil Johnson.

Since Concrete's Continuous Progress Program was implemented, average daily attendance has increased from 89 percent to 93 percent, and retention has dropped dramatically. In the past three years, only two students have been retained at Concrete Elementary. The figure compares to about 15 to 20 children retained prior to the program.

Concrete Elementary has been named a School for the 21st Century by the Washington Office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction. In addition, the school was chosen as a State Mentoring School, and was awarded the 1993 Golden Apple for excellence in education in Washington.

Building a successful multiage Continuous Progress Program is hard work that requires thoughtful deliberation and involvement of teachers, parents, and others in the community. "You don't get up one morning and say, 'Gee, let's change our school's entire format and go multiage,'" Fitting says. "The time you put in will determine the success or failure of your program. Put the time in, and you will be satisfied and your students will flourish."

RESOURCE NOTES: For more information contact Principal Loren Fitting at Concrete Elementary School, Superior Avenue, Concrete, Washington 98237, (360) 853-8145. For a fuller discussion of Concrete Elementary School's multiage program, see Children at the Center *by Dr. Bruce Miller, available from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, (800) 438-8841. For copies of* Making Decisions About Grouping in Language Arts *by Dr. Glenellen Pace, call Linda Revels at NWREL, (503) 275-9519.*

Mardi Berkhouse Jones is a freelance writer, poet, and farmer living in Concrete, Washington. ■

MY NAME IS DOUG CROSBY, and I teach first grade at Cherry Valley Elementary School in Polson, Montana. Many of the visitors who come to my classroom are surprised by what they see. The comments I often hear sound much like this: "What do you use for discipline?" "How do the kids know what to do?" "This is really different."

What I do in the classroom is no different from what I've done since starting my teaching career in New Zealand in the early 1980s. In my room, you will not find desks arranged in straight rows isolating kids from one another. Instead, you will see tables where kids can work together and support each other. Stacks of ditto sheets give way to authentic children's writing in draft and published forms. And complicated discipline plans are unnecessary when students are actively engaged in their learning.

To some, my room may appear to be disorganized and occupied by a bunch of talkative kids. I like to think of it as a self-motivated class of engaged learners. My basic teaching philosophies are rather simple, particularly when talking about the language arts field. I begin with the notion that all reading and writing must have a valid purpose. Then, I teach reading by getting the kids to read, and I teach writing by getting the kids to write. With that, you have my program.

Everything I do in my classroom is centered around the child, and wherever that child is on her developmental journey. I believe that seeing and teaching each child individually is an important step in creating a developmentally appropriate practice. All too often I have seen curricula in primary classrooms driven by a textbook notion of where the "average" first-grader should be at some arbitrary point during the school year. If we are realistic, we know that we always have students at all points of a literacy continuum. In my classroom, I identify, through assessment, where each student is on that continuum, and help move him forward from that point.

This year I teach 22 first-graders who cover a wide range of developmental levels. I have developed a number of teaching strategies to meet the needs of each individual student.

ORGANIZATION IS THE KEY

In order to identify needs in reading, I use "running records," a technique developed by Marie Clay and used extensively in Reading Recovery. The running record will tell me what reading behaviors and strategies a child is using, and what level books I need to have available to that child. Since I have several students who are at similar developmental levels, I can provide independent book boxes to meet the individual needs of students.

I introduce new text of slightly higher difficulty and facilitate support in guided silent reading sessions that allow students to experience success. In this way, I am helping each student advance to the next level of understanding.

Writing works much the same way. Since I need to know what each student can already do, I always begin with an assessment. What is the point of teaching the whole class about using a period when half of them are routinely using it in their writing? I know from experience that if I teach something already understood by some children, I run the risk of boring students, fostering discipline problems, and turning kids off to learning.

Next, I list their accomplishments in the back of their draft writing books under the heading, "I can." I hold the students accountable for what they already know in each of our meetings.

I then identify a learning path for the student and write this under a heading, "I am learning to." Identifying the next learning step creates a center for discussion the next time I meet with the child in conference. This technique has been tremendously successful. I don't have to remind students about the direction of their learning; they know it and work on it independently.

I approach spelling in much the same way. I look in children's draft writing books for close approximations, those words that the student is almost spelling correctly. During the week, each student receives three to five new spelling words that were close approximations for them. They practice spelling these words at school and at home. However, I do not assess their spelling in a test each week. Instead, I look for the particular words to be spelled correctly in future draft writings.

Schoolwide, we use a list of 230 essential words for writing. Each student has a list of these words on file, and each teacher highlights fluent words. Our expectation is that by the end of third grade, all students will be able to spell all of the 230 essential words, at least.

FITTING IT ALL IN

It takes a shift in scheduling in order to integrate a child-centered, individual-learning approach in your classroom. For example, I have a language arts block that lasts for about two hours instead of teaching spelling for 10 minutes, reading for 20 minutes, and writing for 20 minutes. During the language arts block, students make choices that are based on a daily plan that they set for themselves.

I determine a group of set activities that students need to be engaged in during this time: silent reading, handwriting, spelling, draft writing and publishing, and selection of take-home reading material. All students participate in these activities, but they choose the order in which to complete them. While students work on these language arts activities, I work on reading, writing, and spelling with other students individually or in small groups.

This approach takes a lot of planning, demonstration, and modeling. At this stage of the year, we are still doing many activities together. I have found that if I have not modeled and demonstrated each activity well, the students will not be able to work well on their own. Once this student planning time is introduced, it is one of the most relaxing times of the day. My students are working independently on each facet of their plan, and I visit with them when I feel it necessary to do so.

What about my expectations at the end of the year? First, I expect that I will have a group of first-graders who can work very well on their own. When they are faced with a problem, they will first try to solve it themselves, but they also know that I will assist them if necessary. Most of the children will be able to write independently and have anywhere from 40 to 80 fluent words. They will be reading fluently at a wide range of levels and be employing a number of reading strategies.

This is a tremendously challenging way of teaching, but without a doubt it is also the most rewarding.

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At Northwest Education, *we eavesdrop on online discussions of educators and parents from around the country to gain perspective for, appreciation of, and insights into the day-to-day concerns of teachers, administrators, consultants, and parents. On the Early Childhood Education listserv, developmentally appropriate practices have been a hot topic. Beth Conant, a consultant with Early Intervention Technical Assistance, Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education, recently contributed an insightful review of some of the typical questions about DAP asked by teachers and parents. We reprint her column with permission.*

When kindergarten teachers and parents are first introduced to developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), there are questions that typically arise. The following are a sampling of some of the most frequently asked questions concerning DAP.

Q: SHOULDN'T WE ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO KEEP THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME TO MATURE FOR ANOTHER YEAR IF THE CHILD IS NOT READY FOR KINDERGARTEN?

A: By definition, a developmentally appropriate setting meets the needs of all children. A developmental curriculum is designed to fit the needs of each child, in contrast to the traditional kindergarten curriculum into which we try to fit all children. When the curriculum and program are appropriate, even those children who might have experienced difficulty in a traditional kindergarten program benefit by school participation. These are the children who most need to be in school where they are being stimulated and challenged.

Q: WHY DO WE NEED TO CHANGE HOW WE TEACH CHILDREN?

A: As educators and parents, it is our goal to prepare children for the world of tomorrow, not the world of yesterday. We are not advocating that we throw everything out that we now do with young children, but that we look more carefully at how young children learn. What we know about how young children grow and learn has increased over the past 50 years. We now must incorporate that good information into what we do to facilitate learning.

We know that the business world is looking for individuals with very different skills from those required of workers 20 years ago. The Fortune 500 published a list of most desired skills in 1990. The top five skills in order of importance were teamwork, problem solving, interpersonal skills, oral communication, and listening. In order to prepare students to assume productive roles in our society, we must address the individual learning needs of every child, not just those children who come to school fitting neatly into our curriculum. We must add to the rich legacy of skill and knowledge acquisition those skills that will enable our children to become productive adults and lifelong learners in a changing world.

Q: STUDENTS TODAY JUST WANT TO BE ENTERTAINED. WE HAVE TO GET CHILDREN READY TO BE STUDENTS, TO SIT STILL AND PAY ATTENTION. ISN'T IT OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO GET KIDS READY TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF THE NEXT GRADE?

A: Many kindergarten students are not developmentally ready to sit still for long periods of time. Learning to sit still is a lot like learning to walk. Parents wait with anticipation for their baby's first steps, but they can't force the baby to walk before she is ready. The ability to sit still develops in much the same way in preschool and primary-level students. It's not that young students are bad or wish to disobey the teacher. Their developmental level makes it impossible for them to sit quietly and listen for longer than 10 or 15 minutes at a time. Usually by the time a child is in second grade her attention span has increased considerably and she is ready to begin sitting for longer periods of time.

Kindergarten students learn concepts best if we teach them in a manner which is appropriate to their developmental levels. They need many experiences which are activity-oriented and which begin with the manipulation of concrete objects. The five-year-old is still developing language skills. When we ask her to spend much of her time listening instead of interacting with peers and adults, we limit her opportunity to hear and use language.

Our responsibility is to help children to grow and learn as much as they can in the months that we have them. At each grade level, our first duty is to our children, not to the teacher at the next grade level. If we can produce kindergarten students who are excited about school and learning and who look forward with confidence to using newly learned skills in the next grade or level and beyond, we have fulfilled our main responsibility.

Q: HOW EXPENSIVE WILL THIS APPROACH BE TO IMPLEMENT?

A: Many districts already have much of the equipment and supplies necessary to implement DAP. In some cases, it necessitates looking at existing equipment in new and different ways, such as rearranging furniture so that interest areas are defined and desks are put together to form work surfaces; pulling manipulatives, paper, and art supplies out of cupboards and putting them in children's reach on shelves; etc.

If the district needs additional supplies or equipment, it might reallocate some of the money used to order workbooks and put it toward the purchase of developmental materials. The district might solicit used toys and manipulatives from families whose children have outgrown them. It might present a wish list to PTA and community organizations. Some equipment might be made in junior and senior high school shop classes. These concerns are really the easy part of implementing DAP.

The most costly aspect of implementing developmentally appropriate practices is providing the training, technical assistance, and time for staff to meet for planning and reflection as they make ongoing changes. These expenses may require that a district rethink how it spends training dollars. Creative scheduling may provide planning time without additional expense. One of the most important ingredients in successful implementation of DAP costs little, but requires thoughtful planning, commitment, and dedication. That ingredient is the unflagging support of a district's or program's administration.

Q: HOW AM I GOING TO FIND TIME TO MAKE ALL OF THESE CHANGES?

A: Change should be a gradual process taken in increments which are comfortable for those who must implement them. It is helpful if teachers have the opportunity to share ideas and to plan together. Each teacher does not have to have all of the materials necessary to implement a developmental program. A sharing of equipment and materials through rotation from teacher to teacher is an efficient way of disseminating ideas and materials. Teachers might solicit assistance from PTA and community organizations to construct or buy learning games and materials. They might use parent and community volunteers and peer tutors to provide assistance with students in the developmental program. Of course, the support of administration is absolutely necessary.

Q: WHAT ABOUT STATE MANDATES TO TEACH SO MANY MINUTES EACH DAY OF MATH, READING, SCIENCE, ETC?

A: Many states do not mandate minutes of instruction per subject area per day. They mandate that a total number of hours of instruction occur in each subject area in a year. How a teacher or district chooses to apportion those minutes is an individual choice. Some of the best instruction occurs when teachers and children become immersed in an activity or lesson which cannot be quantified by minutes expended. Arbitrary period breaks interfere with this type of immersion. As a result, districts are encouraged to meet the state mandate, but in creative ways which allow teachers to be flexible in the scheduling of subjects and activities. For example, a gross motor activity on the playground which incorporates the teaching of number concepts could be counted as minutes in physical education and mathematics.

Q: I'VE BEEN IN EDUCATION FOR A LONG TIME AND DAP DOESN'T LOOK NEW TO ME. HOW IS DAP DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WE DID IN KINDERGARTENS BACK IN THE '40S AND '50S?

A: Developmentally appropriate practice doesn't look different from the kindergarten classroom of the '50s. Many of the materials and activities are the same. The difference lies in the fact that in the developmentally appropriate classroom, the needs of all children are met. In the '50s, if a child arrived in kindergarten reading, she stepped back and participated in all the pre-reading activities in which the other children were involved and put off learning to read until first grade.

In the developmental kindergarten, a child who is ready to read and enjoys reading is taught reading skills. The child who is not ready to learn his letters is involved in prereading activities which develop visual, auditory, and motor skills which will prepare him to learn letters later. Individual differences are met through skill groups and learning areas which are stocked with materials that meet a variety of learning styles and levels.

Q: IF WE'RE TEACHING STUDENTS AT MANY DIFFERENT LEVELS IN KINDERGARTEN, WHAT HAPPENS TO THEM WHEN THEY GET TO FIRST GRADE?

A: Students have always been sent to first grade from traditional programs at many different skill levels. There never has been a magic wand that transformed a class of diverse learners into a homogenous group.

The danger is that teachers may forget that this diversity has always existed. When a different approach is implemented, this diversity may be attributed to the approach. A developmentally appropriate approach need not end because children have moved on to first grade. A mismatch between curriculum, teaching strategies, and child development may be present throughout the primary grades.

Q: I TEACH IN A DISTRICT WHICH IS INTEGRATED WITH EQUAL NUMBERS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN AMERICAN STUDENTS. HOW DOES DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE APPLY IN MY CIRCUMSTANCE?

A: The inclusion of instruction around multicultural issues should be an important component of any approach. All children develop in a sequential, predictable pattern, regardless of ethnic background. Developmentally appropriate practice addresses individual learning needs and styles whatever the ethnic background of the child.

Q: ISN'T THIS APPROACH REALLY JUST "DUMBING-DOWN" THE CURRICULUM SO THAT SLOWER CHILDREN CAN CATCH UP?

A: If a program is truly developmental, it takes children from where they are developmentally and provides experiences to challenge each of them.

In a developmental classroom, much less time is spent teaching children in a whole group. The classroom provides a balance of whole group, small group, and individual activities with periods of quiet work and active exploration. It is equipped with a wide variety of rich learning materials which children use in different ways depending on their prior knowledge, their interests, and/or the teacher's determination. Children are encouraged to actively explore these materials and interact with children and adults in the room in order to acquire skills and knowledge, and explore interests.

Materials are concrete, three-dimensional, and open-ended, allowing children to use them differently based upon their developmental level. For instance, blocks may be manipulated and stacked by young children, but become rich resources for exploring number relationships, geometry, and other math concepts for older children. Each child is seen as an individual with unique strengths and needs. It is the teacher's role to identify those strengths and needs and to tailor opportunities and challenges for learning and growth for each child no matter what her developmental level.

Send further questions about DAP to cokids@nauticom.net

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Charters at a Crossroads

ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS THE KEY TO INNOVATION AND CHOICE WITHIN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM?

The charter schools movement stands at a critical juncture. As the movement's earliest charters come up for renewal in bellwether states such as Minnesota and Arizona, this six-year-old experiment in public school choice is poised to prove whether it can pass the real test of school reform: Does it improve student learning?

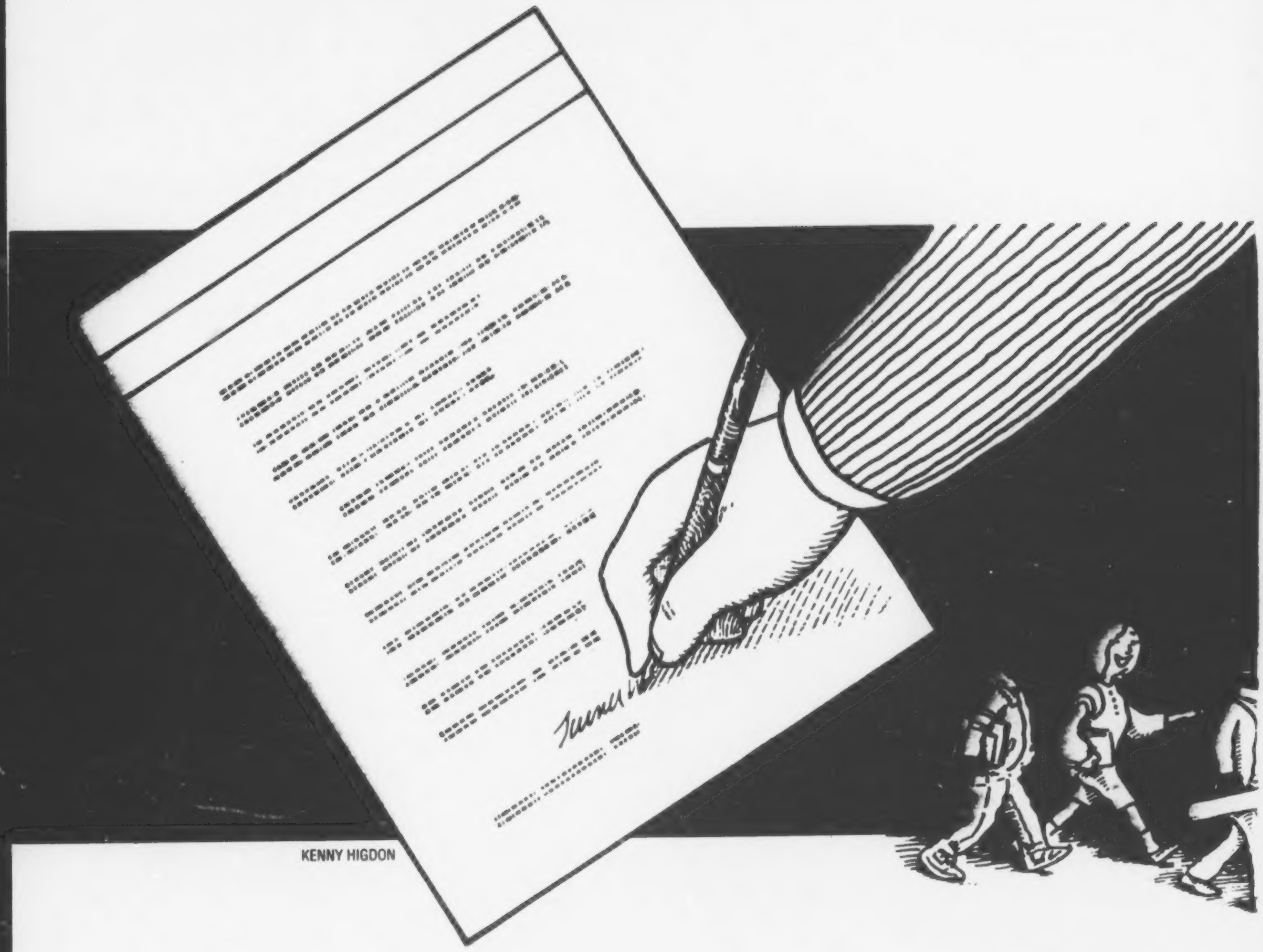
Results are at the very heart of charter schools. The charters, or contracts, that grant public funding to schools launched by grassroots groups of parents or teachers hinge on outcomes. If the school fails to produce the results it pledged to produce, the charter may be revoked. Charter schools promise the kind of direct accountability to public and parents that too often eludes government-run public schools.

Until now, the promise of charter schools has been just that: a promise. Most of the evidence of charter schools' effectiveness has been scattered and anecdotal rather than comprehensive and scientific. But as the first of the nation's 500 charter schools are faced with proving their worth or losing their contract, charter schools' friends and foes alike will be closely examining the data. A number of national studies are in the pipeline.

All along the political spectrum, the charter schools movement stirs up heated debate, evident in the ballooning body of charter schools literature and in the nation's statehouses, where charter schools legislation is being drafted coast-to-coast. Because charter schools can take any shape, advance any theory, float any approach, they offer an unprecedented opportunity for choice and diversity within the public school system. Many advocates see them as petri dishes where parents and educators can grow new and exciting educational cultures.

Perhaps the biggest shift in thinking embedded in the charter schools concept is the idea that students and their parents are "consumers" or "customers." When parents and students have the option to go elsewhere in the educational marketplace—"to vote with their feet"—schools are more likely to respond to families' needs and concerns. By stimulating competition for scarce educational dollars, advocates argue, charter schools can catalyze innovation throughout the public school system.

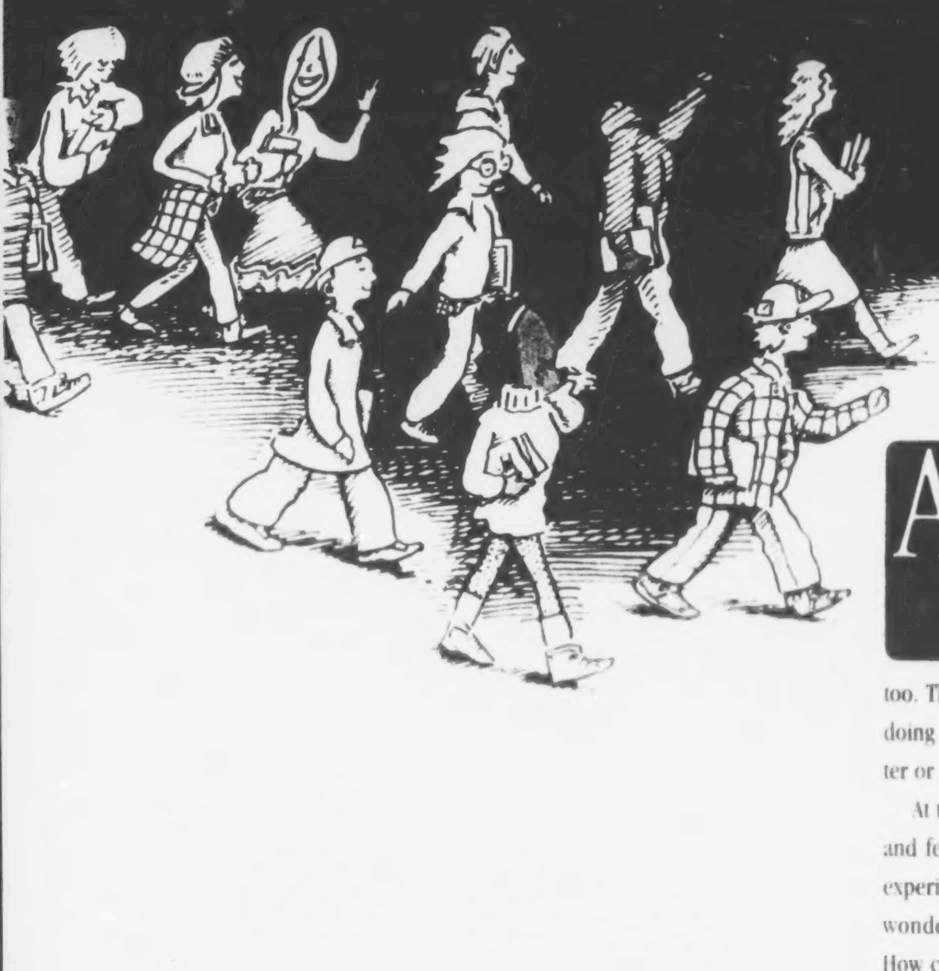
In this issue, we present the viewpoints of a big-city district superintendent, a teachers' union representative, a school boards association director, and a state education board member. We also offer an intimate look at the dreams (and nightmares) of several determined groups of charter founders.



KENNY HIGDON

Charter for Change

The Northwest Has Spawned Only a Handful of Charter Schools, but Educators and Legislators Across the Region are Joining the Debate



Americans are clamoring for choices from the nation's schools. More and more parents want to send their kids to schools that offer, say, Japanese immersion. Or cutting-edge technology. Or intensive phonics. They want results, too. They want evidence that their child's school is doing a good job—that is, equipping their daughter or son for success.

At the same time, educators complain that state and federal rules and regulations are squelching experimentation. How can schools innovate, they wonder, when they are buried in bureaucracy? How can they guarantee results when they are tangled in red tape?

It is at the intersection of these demands—more choice, more accountability, less red tape—that the charter schools idea emerged. The concept is simple: "swapping rules and regulations for results," in the words of Chester Finn, Bruno Manno, and Louann Bierlein in a 1996 report from the Hudson Institute, a conservative think tank. "Those who start charter schools are engaged in what former U.S. Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander called 'old-fashioned horse trading,'" Finn says in *Charter Schools in Action: What Have We Learned?* "Being directly accountable for one's results—and free to achieve them as one sees fit—is a combination rarely seen in conventional public schools."

Here's how charter schools work in theory: A group or individual—usually parents, teachers, or some combination of both—applies to start a new public school (or convert an existing school). Depending on the state, charter schools can be sponsored by local school districts, state boards of education, universities, or, sometimes, an independent charter schools board. If the application is accepted, a contract or "charter" is drawn up, spelling out how the school will be run, what it will accomplish, and how it will document results. The school has a time limit—typically three to five years—for achieving what it promised. If it fails, it loses its charter. The charter school receives a per-pupil allotment from state education funds—the same money that would have followed the student to a government-run public school had she enrolled there instead. But the money comes without the regulatory strings that entangle so many regular public schools.

Since the nation's first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1991, close to 500 charters have been granted. Although more than half the states now have some kind of charter schools law on the books, those laws look very different from state to state. Some are drawn broadly, giving charter schools blanket waivers of state regulations and freeing them of local district oversight, for example. Others are written with more restrictions. They might, for example, limit charters school sponsorship to local districts, or require charter schools to apply for waivers one rule at a time. (Charter schools cannot waive health, safety, or civil rights mandates.)

Not only do laws look different from state to state, but charter schools, too, take wildly different forms and spring from all sorts of philosophical and political viewpoints. They range, for example, from a 58-student bilingual school tucked into one end of an Oregon City elementary school to a 455-student back-to-basics academy housed in a compound of double-wide modulars on the outskirts of Phoenix (see Page 24).

In November, Northwest educators, parent activists, and policymakers gathered to study charter schools legislation and literature, to share developments in their home states, and to sort out the issues that will define and shape the movement as it takes root in the region. The Northwest Symposium for Charter School Policy, sponsored by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, brought together a cross section of leaders in education, government, and community from the states of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming.

Charter schools are just emerging in the Northwest. Two states, Alaska and Wyoming, have charter laws on the books but only a handful of charter schools in operation. While Oregon has no charter schools law, it has found a way to use federal funds to launch charter schools under existing school reform laws. Idaho, Montana, and Washington are in various stages of drafting legislation. (See Page 11 for the status of charter schools in Northwest states.)

The many-hued Northwest picture brings into focus a theme that emerged strongly during the symposium: There is no "one size fits all" pattern for charter schools. How a given state approaches charter schools will depend on existing law, educational practice, political climate, community attitude, and local need. Policymakers should use other states' laws and experiences as starting points, not prescriptions, the symposium participants agreed.

Other key issues explored at the symposium are summarized below.

Accountability and Evaluation. With the charter schools movement now in its sixth year, educational research institutions increasingly are turning their attention to accountability questions. The immediate questions revolve around practical matters: which student outcomes to look for, how to design an evaluation plan, how to make assessment match instruction, how to revoke the charter of a school that fails to fulfill its promises.

At stake, however, are even bigger questions—questions that test the very viability of charter schools: Do charter schools work? Should scarce local, state, and federal dollars be used to fund new charters? Are charter schools a desirable component of the public school system?

Student assessment is a hurdle that could trip up charter schools individually and collectively. Charter schools typically use unconventional, creative approaches to teaching. But, as is often the case in government-run public schools as well, when it's time to measure the effects of teaching on learning, the tired old standardized tests get trotted out. Research has shown that assessment drives instruction. By relying on traditional tests to assess the effectiveness of instruction, schools and districts risk skewing instruction to make it match the tests. In so doing, they are in danger of recreating the status quo.

"We're expecting charter schools to be different," said Douglas Thomas of the Center for School Change, a moderator at the symposium. "But then we're evaluating them on the same content standards as other public schools. We've got to understand that we can't rely only on standardized tests."

Although freedom from rules and regulations is supposed to give charter schools the latitude to innovate, it would be a great irony, Leon Fuhrman of Oregon's state education department pointed out, if they then had to use traditional tests to prove their worth and ensure their existence. He predicted that for charter schools given "freedom from all regs except testing, the testing will kill 'em."

Choice implies diversity, while uniform standards imply sameness, observed Steve Nelson of the Northwest Laboratory. Trying to apply uniform standards to innovative schools is like trying to put a square peg in a round hole. "We tend to fall back into systems that paralyze a lot of kids, and kids become passive learners," observed Thomas. "It's a real struggle not to go back to the old ways."

As the charter schools mature, the public and policymakers increasingly are asking, Do they work? The next question is, If not, what then? One charter school, EduTrain in California, already has folded for financial malfeasance. Another charter school, Prairie Island Community School in Minnesota, failed because the local tribe withdrew support. A question that increasingly will surface is, What happens to students when a charter is revoked for fiscal or academic reasons? Students risk educational disruption when charter school operators fail to live up to the terms of their contract. Minnesota has addressed the issue in part by giving charter schools one year to "get their act together" when their charter is in danger, Thomas said.

To those who worry about what will happen if a charter school closes, state Representative Fred Tilman of Idaho had this to say: "Great. The system works. The sad thing is a public school that is failing kids but *doesn't* close and just keeps on chugging and chugging."

Being accountable—knowing that the doors stay open only if students succeed—gives an urgency to charter schools' mission that often is missing in public schools that get funded year after year regardless of outcomes. "The accountability is on our minds all the time," said teacher Terri Austin, a founder of the Chinook Charter School in Fairbanks, Alaska. "We see that charter as our personal promise to the school board and the parents." (See Page 20 for more on Chinook.)

Autonomy. The degree of independence enjoyed by charter schools is determined largely by two bodies: the state legislature and the sponsoring agency. So-called "strong" charter states grant broad autonomy through laws that waive state regulations, that offer a number of options for sponsorship, and that provide a process for appeal when an application is denied (see "Sponsorship and Appeals" below). Some states grant a "superwaiver," which sweeps away volumes and volumes of bureaucratic red tape that can hamstring schools' efforts to innovate. In Alaska, "We waived everything we could possibly waive except state testing," said Robert Gottstein of the State Board of Education. This "freedom from administrative constraints," said Austin, "offered great professional opportunities" for creativity and innovation at the charter school she founded. Other states require schools to request waivers regulation by regulation, providing justification for each.

Although rule waivers are central to the charter school concept, it's not always clear to charter schools or to sponsors which rules are void under the charter. Thomas described the approach in many jurisdictions as "don't ask, don't tell."

"No one really defines which ones are waived," with the exception of health and safety standards, he noted.

Charter schools advocates argue that the whole rationale for charter schools hinges on the red tape-accountability tradeoff: maximum operational and instructional freedom in exchange for strict accountability for student outcomes. States or sponsoring agencies that hold charter schools to the same kinds of regulations that stifle experimentation in government-run public schools risk recreating the very system that charter schools were designed to circumvent.

"This is a contract process," said Tilman. "You can write anything in that you want to. The more you can make it permissive rather than mandated, the better off you will be. The fewer hoops, the more likely you'll get the program up and running."

Leon Fuhrman of the Oregon education department argued that Oregon, along with many states, provides opportunities for innovation and regulatory freedom within existing school-reform laws. Passing charter schools legislation simply creates another layer of bureaucracy, he asserted.

"Charter school laws will grow up and become bureaucratic, and they will have rules and regs and, ultimately, they will become the same thing we have now." Fuhrman said states should "tweak" existing reform laws and "build on what exists" instead of writing new laws.

A number of autonomy questions remain to be hammered out: Should charter schools be allowed to own their building? Should whole districts be allowed to become all-charter districts, in which state regulations are waived across the board? Should individual charter schools become districts unto themselves?

Sponsorship and Appeals. In charter schools' quest for freedom from entangling red tape, two questions loom large: Who can sponsor a charter school? And to whom can would-be charter school operators appeal if a sponsoring agency rejects their application? States are all over the map in the openness of their application and appeals process. In some states, only local school districts can sponsor charters. In others, an array of possible sponsors might include the state board of education and the governing board of a university. In still other states, special charter school boards have been created to review applications and oversee operations.

True autonomy for charter schools depends on giving them a variety of options for sponsorship, which includes ongoing fiscal and academic oversight in addition to the power to accept or reject an application, Thomas insisted. Local involvement is desirable, he said. "I think there is a certain value in local culture," he asserted. "There is a local flavor, a difference between schools in Oklahoma or New York or Idaho." But putting all the power for granting charters into the hands of local school boards can have a chilling effect on the launching of new charters.

"The downside of doing it all locally is that you won't have very many charter schools," Thomas said. "States that have an alternate sponsoring mechanism have more charter schools." For emphasis, Thomas paraphrased Ted Kolderie of the Center for Policy Studies, a leader in the charter schools movement, saying: "If you have alternate sponsors, you don't need to talk about autonomy. With alternate sponsors, you *will* have autonomy."

Tilman agreed, saying: "If a school board is the only body that can approve a charter school, there will be zero charter schools. Other bodies should be able to approve a charter—universities, city councils. Laws should at least provide an appeals process—somebody that can give a second opinion."

Choice. Charter schools often are touted as the middle ground between vouchers (referred to as "the V word" by some symposium participants) and more mainstream school-reform efforts such as alternative schools. In contrast to vouchers, which pay parents public dollars to send their kids to private schools, charters offer choice to parents while keeping students within the public school system. "Both are strategies for choice, but they offer it in two different arenas: the private versus the public marketplace," said Tilman.

In contrast to such reform efforts as alternative schools, charters offer fiscal autonomy and broader professional freedom for teachers. Many public schools that have converted to charter-school status have, in fact, been alternative schools looking for more fiscal and instructional flexibility.

"This is about competition *within* the system," Thomas noted. Charter schools advocates argue that by creating choices that attract parents and students—and the per-pupil dollars that follow them—charter schools create incentives for change among existing public schools anxious to retain those students and dollars.

"My district was fed up with the lack of incentives for change," Thomas said. "We have had more changes in the three years since our charter school opened than we had in many years before."

States with existing choice options (such as open enrollment, secondary-college agreements, alternative schools) and "ed-flex" laws (waivers for federal regulations) "have an easier time with charters," according to Thomas. "People are used to having options," he said. "In Minnesota, we absolutely expect that you can choose any school you want. One in five Minnesota students choose their school."

Symposium participants were divided on whether, as some charter school opponents argue, charter schools are a foot in the door of vouchers. Gottstein and Tilman argued that charter schools are, on the contrary, the best defense against vouchers. "Vouchers scare people," Tilman noted. Fuhrman was equally adamant that charter schools can be a dangerous step toward vouchers.

Whether charter schools are more effective than, say, existing public alternative schools has yet to be shown. There's a big research gap, in fact, in the area of alternative schools, according to presenter Lori Mulholland of the Morrison Institute for Public Policy. Studies are needed, she said, to suggest whether alternative schools are achieving autonomy and innovation, as are studies that compare the performance and independence of alternative and charter schools. Such studies are needed before policymakers can decide whether "tweaking" existing laws is enough to spur innovation and public-school choice, as Fuhrman suggested.

Parental choice and grassroots involvement are keys to fostering the buy-in required for any successful school improvement effort. Symposium participants generally agreed that the "real excitement of charter schools is the sense of community around the passion of ownership," in the words of one participant.

The level of parent involvement "goes way up" among charter school families, according to Mulholland. While symposium participants strongly supported parental involvement in schools, they were equally certain that rather than legislating the degree of involvement, charter schools (and all public schools) must find meaningful ways to bring parents into their children's education. Parents need to be in the vortex of policy and curriculum decisions, not limited to organizing bake sales and chaperoning school dances. Participants cautioned, however, that educational excellence is not always the main motivation for parents who choose charters.

"There are many reasons parents switch schools," noted Joyce Harris of NWREL's desegregation assistance center. Parents may feel unwelcome in the neighborhood school, for instance. Charter schools may provide a sense of welcome and inclusion that parents have missed in traditional public schools.

Equity. The advent of charter schools has raised concerns about educational equity. Ironically, those fears are based on opposing worries. Some worry that charter schools will skim off the best students, leaving government-run schools to deal with students more difficult to educate. Others worry that just the opposite will happen: Charter schools will become dumping grounds for hard-to-teach children whom the system has given up on. Another related fear stems from the specter of the "white academies" that sprang up in the South as a way around civil rights legislation of the 1960s, noted Harris. Those schools used tax dollars to run segregated schools that were later ruled illegal by the courts.

As policymakers consider charter schools legislation in coming months, attention must be paid to the impact of charter schools on all populations of students. Laws in some states require that a percentage of charter schools be targeted at disadvantaged students, Mulholland said. If a state has a desegregation plan, charter schools must abide by it. If there is no plan, charter schools must reflect the composition of the area in which they operate. But many questions remain unanswered. For example, what are the equity implications of a new alternative school in Umatilla, Oregon, that is open to everyone, but has an American Indian emphasis?

Thomas predicted a "major desegregation case" will arise in the charter arena. "Is it legal to *choose* to send your kid to a segregated school?" he asked.

"The desegregation centers," added Harris, "are very concerned about charter schools and their impact on desegregation. Charter schools open up a can of worms with respect to equity. Let's face it—you're going to end up with charter schools that are racially isolated."

Opposition. Because charter schools often are freed from collective bargaining agreements between teachers and districts, teachers' unions have been among their most vocal opponents. While it appears that national teachers' organizations have swung to a more supportive stance in recent months, even launching several experimental charter schools of their own, many local teachers' groups continue to resist, Thomas noted.

"Dealing with the unions will be the key to future legislation in Montana," said Bob Anderson of the Montana School Boards Association. "The collective bargaining issues haven't been resolved."

Charter schools typically are not required to hire state-certified teachers, a trend that concerns teachers' unions.

A survey in Washington state found that parents' deepest educational concerns were high standards, not only for students but also for teachers, reported Lee Ann Prielipp of the Washington Education Association. To make sure parental and community concerns are addressed, the decision about certification among charter school teachers should be made locally, Prielipp insisted. And teachers' associations should be brought into the process at the beginning, when laws are being drafted and policies are being set. Prielipp observed that most states have skirted around the unions, telling them, "This is what's going to happen *to* you" after laws have been made. She attributes teachers' defensive stance toward charters to their being excluded from the process.

In Idaho, lawmakers pulled in the state teachers' association in the early stages of drawing up a charter school bill, said Tilman. "We sat down with the union, and they said they wouldn't fight charter schools," said Tilman. "You need to try to bring people on board instead of driving your stake in the ground and saying, 'Let's see how far you can pull it out.'"

Concluded Tilman: "Talk to everyone—the education association, the school boards association, etcetera. Bring all the players together to find out what makes sense in your state."

Thomas argued that charter school teachers should be able to join the professional association yet remain separate from collective bargaining if they wish. "Because teachers are running the charter school, they don't need collective bargaining," he observed.

To ensure that charter schools attract good teachers, they could offer employment guarantees, such as retaining tenure and seniority, for a five-year period, Thomas suggested. Tilman countered that a teacher's move from a traditional public school to a charter school should be treated no differently than a move from one district to another: Tenure and seniority are lost. The concern that good teachers won't make the switch to charter schools without employment guarantees is unfounded in actual practice, where many teachers readily give up district perks for the chance to create a new school from the ground up.

Start-Up Issues. Studies have found that getting start-up funds is the biggest challenge facing new charter schools. Charter school founders often lack the business savvy to keep the financial side running smoothly. Thomas estimates that charter schools need $1,000 per student "just to open the doors." Some states have set aside funds for new charters. Arizona, for instance, has a $1 million pot for stimulus grants, Mulholland reported. Responding to the Clinton administration's strong support for charter schools, Congress has allocated $51 million for planning and implementation grants for 1997. Some charter schools have been successful in securing foundation grants for start-up costs. But many charter school founders have dug into their own pockets.

"We spent $8,000 of our own money to pay for lawyers, inspectors, and other start-up costs," said Austin of Chinook Charter School. "We did it because we had a passion about what we wanted to do."

Money isn't the only hurdle facing new charter schools. Founders should expect "about a year of early management problems," said Thomas. He cites stress, burn-out, friction between parents and teachers, and staff discord as among the problems that can plague new schools. (See Page 31 for Thomas' start-up guide.)

"I don't even know how to describe the pressure," Austin said. "It's like being a juggler; you have to keep 87 plates up at the same time."

States should minimize the hoops and hurdles schools have to negotiate in order to open, Gottstein stressed. Noting that Alaskan charter school founders must "work incredible hours and overcome many things to get their charter passed," Gottstein said that start-up problems should not be "the thing that kills" new schools. "Don't set them up for failure," he urged.

Funding formulas—how much of the state's per-pupil allocation charter schools should get—are another policy question that lawmakers and educators must hammer out. Gottstein was adamant when he said 100 percent of the per-pupil dollars going to government-run schools should follow students who enroll in charter schools. "You shouldn't have to choose less funding in order to get choice," he asserted, noting that in Alaska, charter schools receive on the average $2,000 less per student than government-run schools receive.

Other issues confronting new charter schools include what legal business entity to adopt (for example, a corporation, a cooperative, or a nonprofit), who should manage the money, and who has overall authority (an "egomaniac" is not the best person to run a school, Thomas noted).

"We are compelled as a public entity to provide choice for families," Gottstein said at the symposium's close. "The charter schools law is our single best opportunity to keep people within the public schools."

Participant Jean Ameluxen of the Washington state education agency stressed the "enormous importance of civil discourse" in education reform generally, and in the charter schools movement in particular.

"There is no one way to teach a child," she noted at the symposium's close. "There is no one way to do charter schools. Nobody should say this is the right way, and this is the wrong way. They're all right ways if they result in improved learning for children."

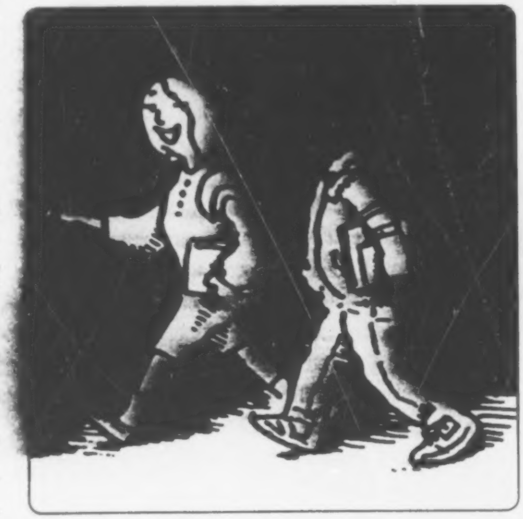
RESOURCE NOTES: Much of the above discussion was excerpted from Charter Schools at the Crossroads: A Northwest Perspective, *the proceedings report of the Northwest Symposium for Charter School Policy, sponsored by NWREL in November. For details and ordering information, please turn to Page 30.*

A Northwest Snapshot. Participants in the Northwest Symposium for Charter School Policy shared the history and current status of charter schools in their states.

Alaska. The Alaska Legislature adopted a charter schools law in 1995. Three charter schools, two in remote areas and one in Fairbanks, got up and running the first year. All three are small, with between 25 and 75 students. The Chinook Charter School in Fairbanks, founded by Terri Austin and three fellow teachers, emphasizes parent involvement and student choice for its K-8 student body. A $2.5 million federal planning and implementation grant will support start-up efforts around the state through 1998. Because typical Alaska residents live in isolated villages separated by hundreds of miles of wilderness, boarding schools should be part of the charter schools equation there, said Robert Gottstein of the State Board of Education.

Idaho. State Representative Fred Tilman of Idaho sponsored charter schools legislation in his state in 1994, 1995, and 1996. After passing in the House, the bill was defeated in the Senate each session. Tilman favors a law with minimal strings and restrictions to ensure maximum freedom for charter schools. His opponents have included the Idaho PTA and the state school boards association. Meanwhile, as "a challenge to all public schools to improve student performance with no rules in the way," the state recently passed a law that eliminated all state education rules and regulations for two years, according to Tilman. Educators will then decide which rules should be reinstated and which ones eliminated.

Montana. Montana's experience with charter schools legislation was a reversal of Idaho's. While in Idaho the state school boards association opposed the charter bill, in Montana the school boards association not only supported, but actually sponsored, the bill proposed in 1996. Of 400 members, only 10 opposed the bill, according to Robert Anderson of the Montana School Boards Association, who noted that in many states, school boards can be a roadblock to charter schools. And in Montana—a rural state with 90 one-room schoolhouses and nearly 150 districts with no administrators—the teachers' union was the major opponent of the legislation, according to Anderson. In contrast, Idaho's teachers' union stayed out of the fray. Montana's charter schools bill failed in the House.



Oregon. A 1995 charter schools bill introduced in the Oregon Legislature was defeated in the Senate. That same year, a petition drive sponsored by the Center for Educational Change to put a charter schools measure on the ballot through a citizens' initiative failed to gather enough signatures to qualify. Charter schools bills will be introduced in 1997 by the Oregon School Boards Association and Associated Oregon Industries. Meanwhile, even without a formal charter schools law, the state will receive $1.3 million in federal charter schools funds for planning, implementation, and capacity-building grants statewide for 1996, 1997, and 1998. Oregon qualified for the federal grants under its reform laws and its alternative

Continued on Page 30

Boomers Want Choice

B y Robert Anderson

During the last state legislative session, the Montana School Boards Association (MSBA) proposed charter school legislation. Senate Bill 370 was intended to "authorize the establishment of a charter school program under the control of a local school board as a means of providing educational opportunities to public school pupils."

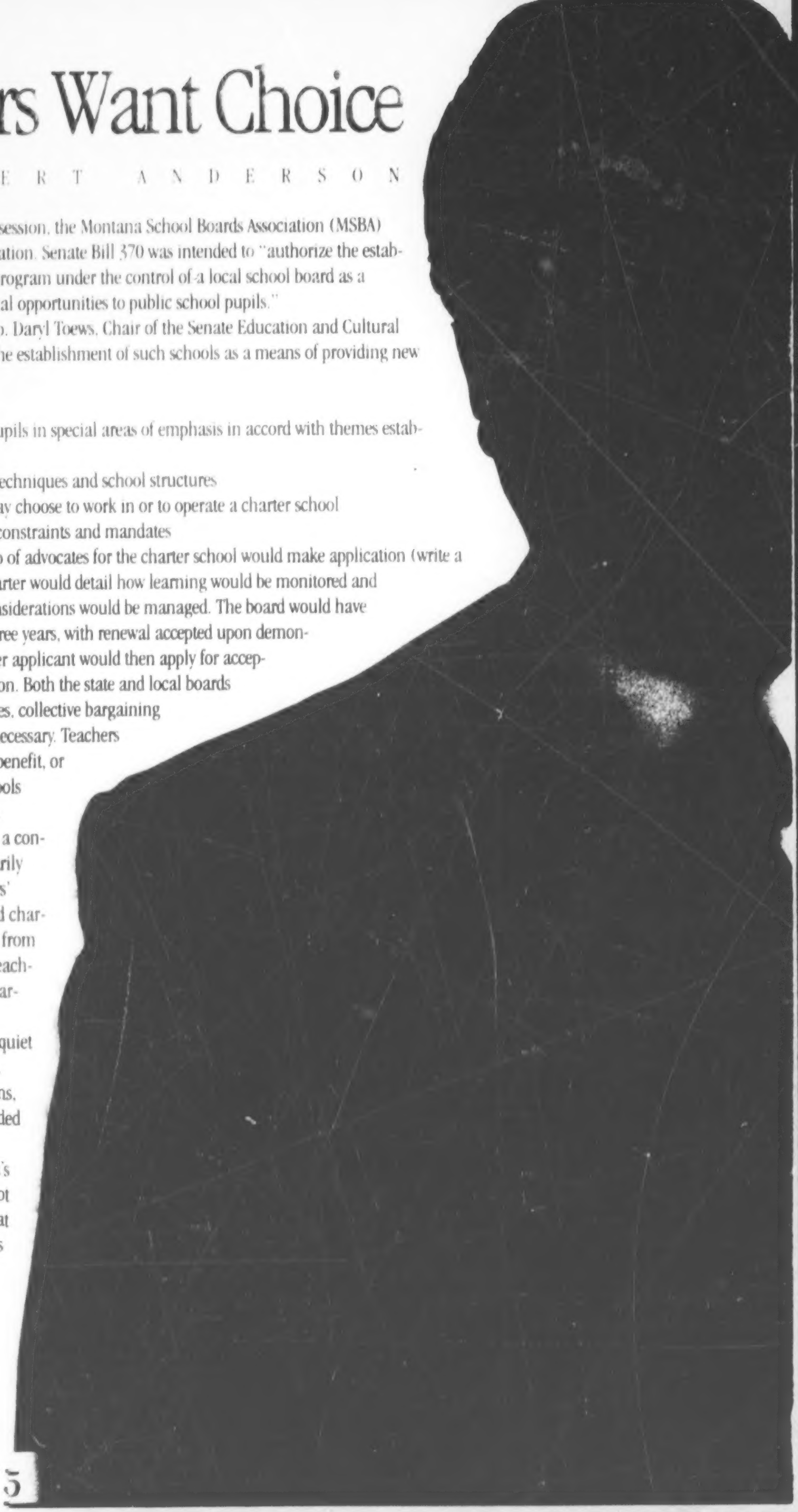
MSBA and the sponsor, Rep. Daryl Toews, Chair of the Senate Education and Cultural Resources Committee, were interested in the establishment of such schools as a means of providing new opportunities for:

- Improved pupil learning
- Increased learning opportunities for pupils in special areas of emphasis in accord with themes established for a charter school
- Creative and innovative instructional techniques and school structures
- Professional vistas for teachers who may choose to work in or to operate a charter school
- Freedom from conventional program constraints and mandates

Under the proposed legislation, a group of advocates for the charter school would make application (write a charter) to the local school board. The charter would detail how learning would be monitored and assessed, as well as how a host of other considerations would be managed. The board would have the option to grant the charter for up to three years, with renewal accepted upon demonstrated success. The local board and charter applicant would then apply for acceptance by the State Board of Public Education. Both the state and local boards could approve exemptions to school policies, collective bargaining provisions, and state rules and statutes if necessary. Teachers and administrators would not lose salary, benefit, or tenure protections. Montana's charter schools could not be used for religious instruction.

Senate Bill 370 passed the Senate with a considerable number of modifications, primarily concerning demands made by the teachers' union. The most onerous of these required charter schools to "apply to and seek approval from the recognized exclusive representative (teachers' union) for a waiver of the collective bargaining provisions that conflict with provisions of the charter." The bill died a quiet death in the House Education Committee. Republicans disliked the union concessions, while Democrats feared the bill was intended as a union-busting measure.

Rocky beginning that it was, Montana's first attempt to create charter schools is not completely dead. The underlying roots that will, I believe, nourish its ultimate success can be found with today's parents and local school board members. Parents today are looking for choices. As American citizens, they recognize that they have a vast array of alternatives that match their beliefs and lifestyle. If they want another doctor's or lawyer's opin-



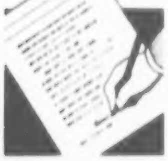
ion, they can get it. If they are dissatisfied with their car, they can trade it for another. If they don't like a particular TV show, they can channel surf till they find one they like. If they don't like their local politician, they vote in a new one. There are even dozens of choices for what to feed the family dog. Baby boomers grew up with the expectation of choice and freedom. They are not inhibited like their parents and grandparents, who had limited choices and typically stuck with the family doctor, automobile, or dogfood year after year.

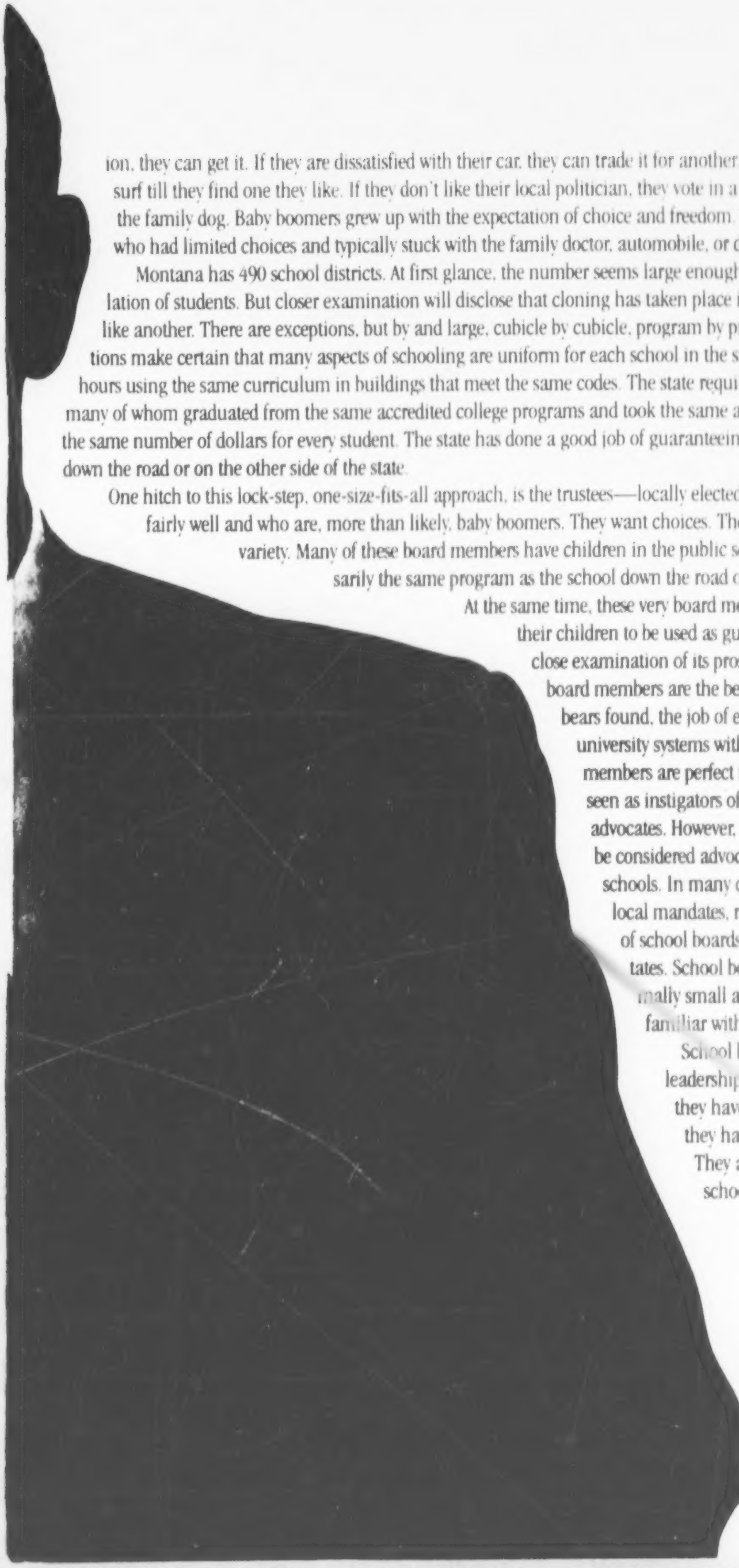
Montana has 490 school districts. At first glance, the number seems large enough to offer a lot of choice for the relatively small state population of students. But closer examination will disclose that cloning has taken place in the public school system. One district looks pretty much like another. There are exceptions, but by and large, cubicle by cubicle, program by program, they are the same. In fact, state laws and regulations make certain that many aspects of schooling are uniform for each school in the state. Schools operate for the same number of days and hours using the same curriculum in buildings that meet the same codes. The state requires all schools to hire certified teachers and administrators, many of whom graduated from the same accredited college programs and took the same accredited classes. To ensure equity, schools statewide spend the same number of dollars for every student. The state has done a good job of guaranteeing that each school will look and perform like the school down the road or on the other side of the state.

One hitch to this lock-step, one-size-fits-all approach, is the trustees—locally elected school board members who represent their constituency fairly well and who are, more than likely, baby boomers. They want choices. They expect freedom from conventional restraints. They like variety. Many of these board members have children in the public schools and want the best programs for them, but not necessarily the same program as the school down the road or across the state.

At the same time, these very board members are responsible people. They are unlikely to allow their children to be used as guinea pigs for some far-out, experimental program without close examination of its pros and cons, costs and benefits. This is why I believe that board members are the best choice for oversight of charter schools. Just as their forebears found, the job of educating our youth is too big for city hall, state officials, or university systems with already huge agendas. Even though local school board members are perfect for the oversight of charter schools, they should not to be seen as instigators of such schools. The main push must come from other local advocates. However, members of the Montana School Boards Association could be considered advocates for their role in promoting legislation to create charter schools. In many cases, they themselves have struggled with federal, state, and local mandates, red tape, and bureaucracy. Most of the federal and state efforts of school boards recently have been to reduce unnecessary top-down dictates. School board members also recognize that charter schools are normally small and not intended for everyone. Montana's trustees are very familiar with small schools and innovation.

School board members have provided competent and accountable leadership in education for nearly 350 years in this country. Though they have been under fire from many directions during their history, they have always survived public scrutiny for one obvious reason: They are the public! The schools belong to the people, and local school board members serve at the will of the people.





Robert Anderson is executive director of the Montana School Boards Association.
Photo by Helena Photography.

We Must Safeguard Equity

By Lee Ann Prielipp

Charter schools hold the promise of bringing out the best in public school classrooms. But if done in the wrong manner, they also could bring in the worst.

Washington voters sent one so-called charter school plan to defeat in November because it contained serious flaws. The initiative offered an easy way to create new, independent schools using public tax money. But it provided little oversight for how the money would be spent or what results would be expected. The failed proposal also imposed a six-year moratorium to make it impossible to switch back to a regular public school even if the new "reformed" school turned out to be seriously flawed.

Washington's largest public employee union, the Washington Education Association (WEA), worked hard to defeat Initiative 177 and a companion measure that would have made private schools eligible for tax-supported vouchers. But under the right conditions, charter schools could be the key to promoting new and creative ways of teaching and learning.

The WEA is strongly committed to free and universal public education with equality of opportunity for all. Our organization supports state reform efforts that result in better learning for our children. We are currently working to assure success in school restructuring through the work of the Commission on Student Learning and the provisions of a state education reform law known as HB1209. These programs are successful because they make student learning the primary focus at all times.

One key to the success of our children is providing educationally sound alternatives to what we know as the traditional program. Charter schools can be another option within the public school system to improve learning opportunities for students.

Charter schools take various forms, but in most cases, a group of teachers or other interested citizens can apply for a charter to create their own public school. The application generally includes a statement of the school's proposed educational program or philosophy, a set of outcomes or standards each student will be expected to meet, and a description of how the outcomes will be measured. Since the wide variety of charter schemes makes a single definition impossible, it is more productive to focus on developing clear criteria for charter schools that work.

At the WEA, we believe a charter school must be a public school, chartered through and responsible to a local school district. The school must be democratic, allowing all groups directly involved to have a voice in the school's governance. It must have a funding formula comparable to other schools, adhere to safety and health standards, have a licensed professional teaching core group, be tuition-free, and be nondiscriminatory in all aspects of its operations. It also must contain provisions for its own termination based on a failure to meet the charter's provisions.

These components are critical to prevent the lower standards and increased racial and class stratification that can occur with charter proposals.

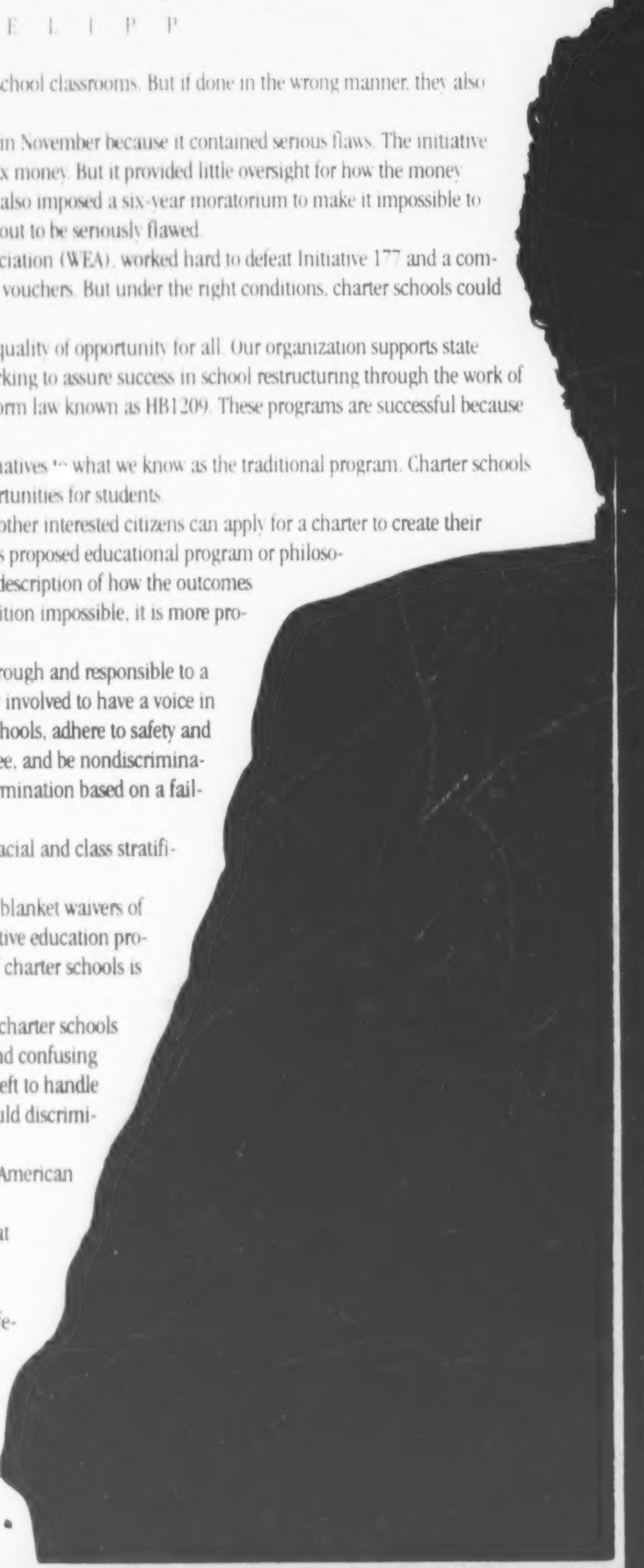
Charter schools should not be created, however, simply as a vehicle to obtain blanket waivers of school regulations. If particular state or federal regulations are obstacles to effective education programs, the regulations should be eliminated for all schools. The primary goal of charter schools is to focus on student learning.

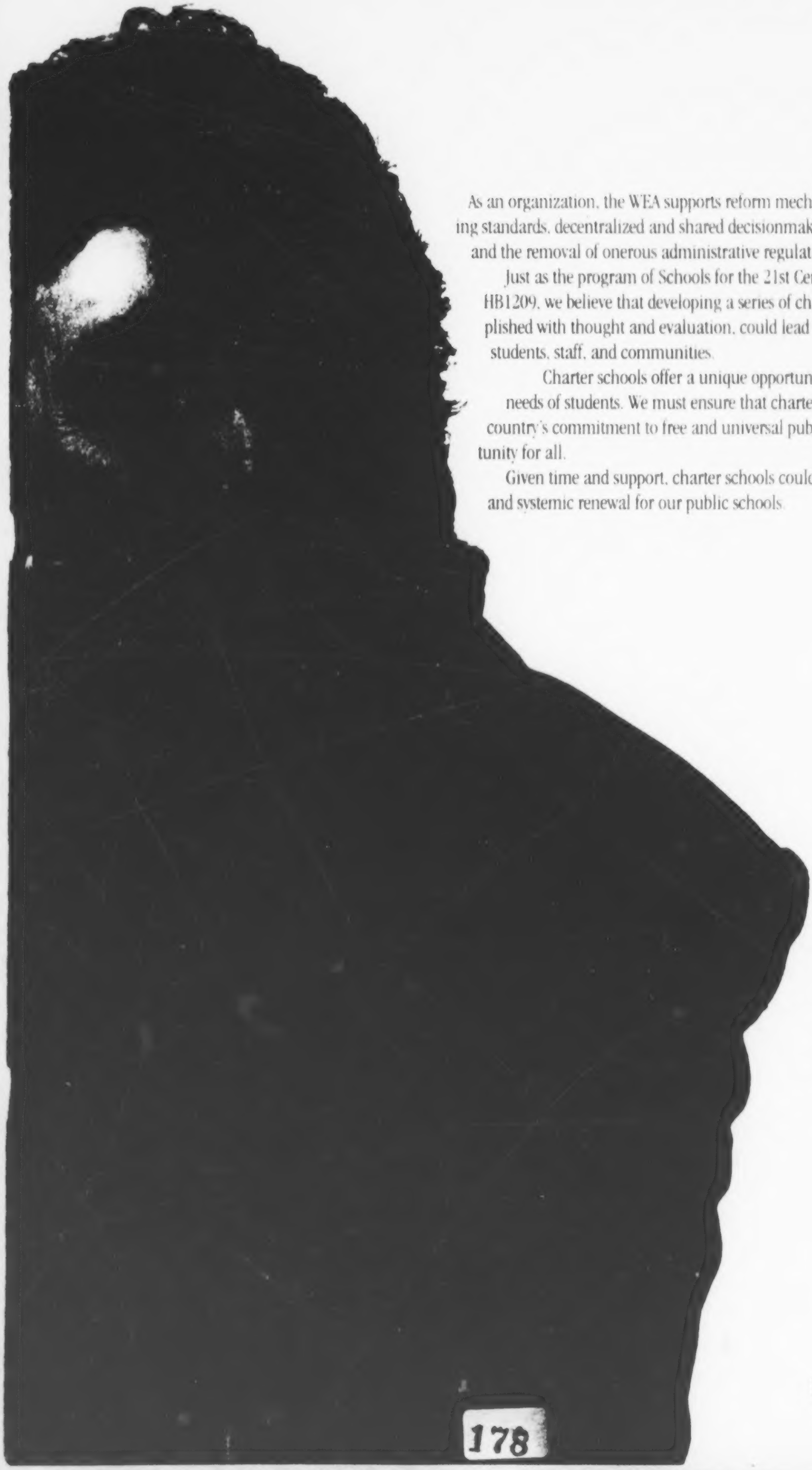
The initiative defeated in November by voters in Washington was touted as a charter schools measure, but it was not. In rejecting the initiative, voters cited its complicated and confusing details as well as its unintended consequences. Public schools would have been left to handle only the most difficult students while others were drawn away to schools that could discriminate based on academic standards, behavior, competence, and gender.

Such a turn would have violated the democratic philosophy that has guided American public schools since their inception.

While Washington voters still support their schools, there is little question that improving public education, especially in the areas of rigorous standards, is a key concern.

Our public schools are capable of innovations that promote change while safeguarding the rights of students and employees and keeping public accountability intact.



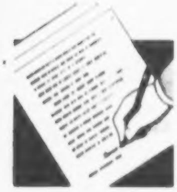


As an organization, the WEA supports reform mechanisms that promote rigorous learning standards, decentralized and shared decisionmaking, diverse educational offerings, and the removal of onerous administrative regulations.

Just as the program of Schools for the 21st Century was a prelude to the reforms of HB1209, we believe that developing a series of charter schools pilot programs, accomplished with thought and evaluation, could lead to systemic change that will benefit students, staff, and communities.

Charter schools offer a unique opportunity to respond to the diverse learning needs of students. We must ensure that charter schools will be consistent with this country's commitment to free and universal public education with equality of opportunity for all.

Given time and support, charter schools could promote a more effective structure and systemic renewal for our public schools.



Lee Ann Prielipp is vice president of the Washington Education Association. Photo by Todd Eckelman.

Spark a Revolution

By Robert Gottstein

Most students coming out of America's public education system are quite competent. Still, far too many students are reaching neither their potential nor our expectations of them. As a result, many Americans believe education costs more than it is worth, and they are less and less willing to pay for it. If this trend continues, we will see teachers' pay and standards decline, student-teacher ratios climb, school buildings deteriorate, and technology leap ahead of our teachings.

Public education once was a weapon against a polarized society of rich and poor. Failing to support our public schools has the effect of encouraging those who can afford it to seek quality private education while leaving the less financially able to make the most of worsening conditions in the public schools. As affluent families flee the public schools in increasing numbers, support for those in need of a free public education will erode further.

Across America—state by state, community by community, family by family—all children should have the opportunity to reach their educational potential. Charter schools offer that opportunity to families through a process of enlightened self-interest, responsibility, authority, and accountability.

But for charter schools to succeed, I believe they must meet three conditions. First, students attending public charter schools should be entitled to 100 percent of the appropriate federal, state, and local dollars committed to all public school students. By withholding financial parity, as some states do, we create a second class of students. Access to local school buildings, transportation outside the neighborhood, and parity in teacher pay will all be necessary for equity and success in the charter movement.

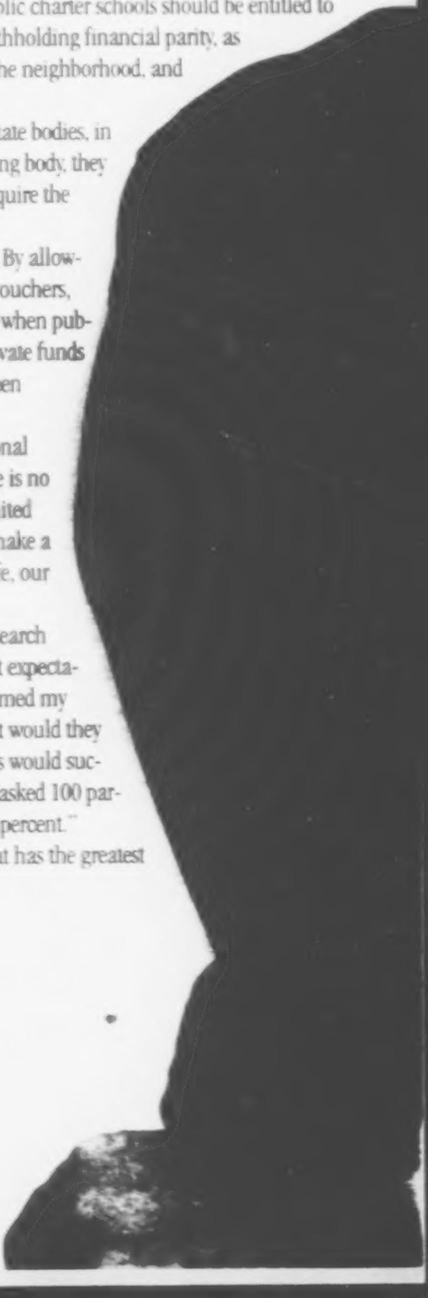
Second, multiple charter school sponsors are essential. Fair negotiations require that alternative local or state bodies, in addition to local school boards, be given the power to grant new charters. When districts are the only sponsoring body, they have nothing to lose by maintaining their control or denying charters. An alternative approval process will require the local districts to bargain in good faith or risk losing charter students and the dollars that follow them.

Third, charter schools can help maintain the separation of church and state in America's public schools. By allowing diverse educational methods to be employed in a secular setting, charter schools are a bulwark against vouchers, which can open the door to using public funds for religious instruction. Voucher systems can look attractive when public schools do not meet diverse needs and community demands head-on. But the mingling of public and private funds through vouchers gives greater opportunities to families of financial means and, I fear, allows the line between church and state to be blurred.

We must make public education worth more than it costs if we expect public support for quality educational opportunities for all of America's children—not just most children, all children. The good news is that there is no place on earth where people have a better opportunity and willingness to meet this challenge than in the United States of America. As Americans, we must get on with the business of making the kinds of change that will make a difference in the lives of millions of children who are falling behind and making our neighborhoods less safe, our families less stable, and our communities less secure.

Parents, families, and students need real opportunities to meet their own expectations and potential. Research shows that high expectations yield high results. Children do best when surrounded by people who have great expectations for them. A conversation I had with America's 1995 National Teacher of the Year, Elaine Griffin, confirmed my beliefs. I posed three questions. First, if you asked 100 people how many children would succeed in life, what would they guess? Her reply: "About 50 percent." Second question: If you asked 100 teachers how many of their students would succeed, what would they say? With some embarrassment, she answered, "Ten percent." Third question: If you asked 100 parents how many of their children would succeed, what would they answer? She smiled and said, "Nearly 100 percent."

I find it remarkable that we have taken so much authority away from parents—the very community that has the greatest



expectations of children—and handed it over to a community whose expectations are so much lower.

Across the broad, political spectrum, most educators and policymakers understand that improved parent involvement is key to improved student performance. Charter schools can allow all parents their best opportunity to seek and find the answers to their children's academic challenges. Charter schools are America's best means of creating a revolution in rising expectations in public education.

As the winds of change in education blow into our communities, let us become the architects of change rather than letting those winds buffet and batter us. Charter schools, by giving choice to families, could become a key feature of the changing face of public education.

Robert Gottstein is a member of the Alaska State Board of Education.
Photo by Boyer Photography.

Redefine School Boundaries

By JACK BIERWIRTH

In five years' time it is very possible—in fact, very likely—that the face of public education will be different than it is today. There still will be teachers and texts, reading and math. But some fundamental aspects of the structure could be very different.

What seems most likely to happen is some form of deregulation, perhaps parallel to what has happened and will continue to happen in the telecommunications and utility fields. If done well, this process is likely to result in educational institutions that are more flexible, more responsive, and more capable of meeting the needs of a society which is changing at an increasingly rapid rate. If done poorly, the process could well result in greater fragmentation of society and a widening of the gulf between haves and have-nots.

While we need to be mindful of the potential pitfalls, it is important that those of us in the education profession enter the discussion (and charter schools are only the first part of what is likely to become a much broader discussion) with a willingness to seize the opportunities and shape the changes in a positive direction.

We think charter schools are a good idea if they are done right. For several years Portland has had a policy on magnets and alternatives—almost an internal charter school policy. That policy challenged interested parents and/or staff groups to step forward and propose new programs or schools within schools. More than a half-dozen new programs have been created already, many of them adding wonderful new options for students, parents, and teachers. They range from an environmental middle school to a parent-cooperative elementary program.

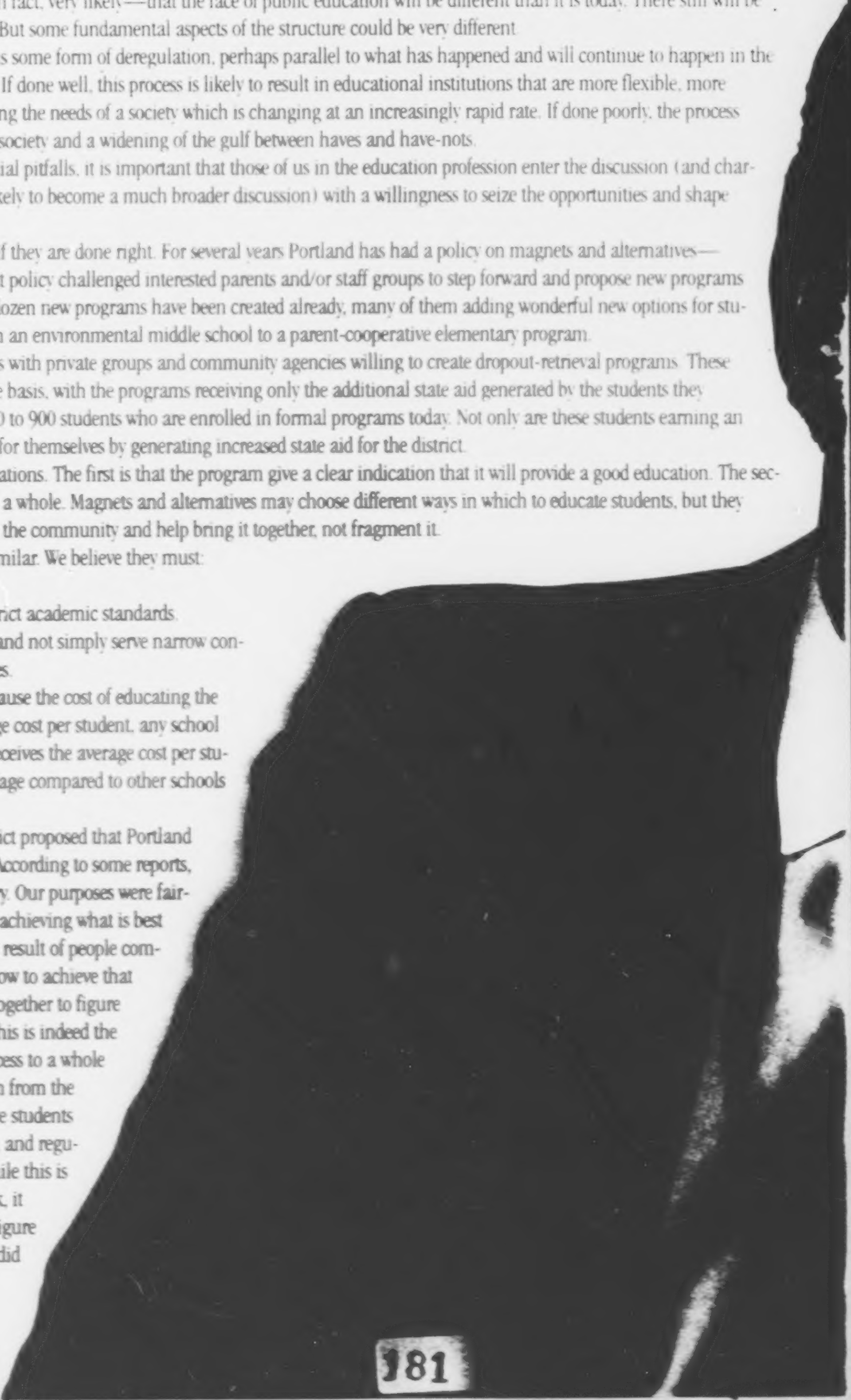
The district also has entered into contracts with private groups and community agencies willing to create dropout-retrieval programs. These have all been constructed on a pay-for-service basis, with the programs receiving only the additional state aid generated by the students they retrieve. These programs have "retrieved" 700 to 900 students who are enrolled in formal programs today. Not only are these students earning an education but they are also, in effect, paying for themselves by generating increased state aid for the district.

Our internal policy has two simple expectations. The first is that the program give a clear indication that it will provide a good education. The second is that it contribute to the community as a whole. Magnets and alternatives may choose different ways in which to educate students, but they should enhance our collective ability to serve the community and help bring it together, not fragment it.

Our expectations of charter schools are similar. We believe they must:

- Hold the promise of good education.
- Be accountable for meeting state and district academic standards.
- Contribute to the community as a whole and not simply serve narrow constituencies intent on separating themselves.
- Be funded in an appropriate manner. Because the cost of educating the "average" child is far less than the average cost per student, any school that educates only average students but receives the average cost per student would have a significant cost advantage compared to other schools and programs.

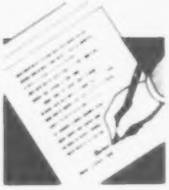
In March 1996, the Portland School District proposed that Portland consider becoming a charter school district. According to some reports, ours was the first such proposal in the country. Our purposes were fairly simple. First and foremost, we believe that achieving what is best in education, or in any field, is inevitably the result of people coming together with a vision and figuring out how to achieve that vision. Little is achieved when groups come together to figure out how to better implement regulations. If this is indeed the case for schools, why not apply the same process to a whole school district? Why not build a school system from the ground up based upon what is needed to serve students best and ask for waivers from any laws, rules, and regulations which are obstacles to doing that? While this is obviously a daunting, even intimidating, task, it should also be fun challenging ourselves to figure out how we would do things differently if we did them the way we really wanted to.



The second purpose is to figure out how to redefine the "boundaries" of a public school system so that it becomes more open to competition but does so in a way that is inclusive. While the diversity of American society is one of its strengths, there are far too many areas where diversity becomes division, forming dangerous fault lines. In many cities these fault lines in the field of education are all too clear: Affluent parents send their children to well-funded, private or parochial schools or move to the suburbs; poorer parents are forced to sent their children to public schools which are often underfunded and uncompetitive.

It is time to redefine what constitutes a public school system so that it becomes more inclusive and challenges all educational institutions to become part of a system that serves the whole community. It is time to bring that community together to ensure that all students achieve at high levels.

***Jack Bierwirth** is superintendent of Portland Public Schools*
***Photo** by Todd Eckelman*



Dream Team

FOUR
LIKE-
MINDED
TEACHERS
GIVE THEIR ALL
TO CREATE
A SCHOOL
FROM
SCRATCH

FAIRBANKS, Alaska—Sunlight is sparse here in December, when darkness holds the stars for 20 hours before daybreak whispers across the horizon like a secret.

The previous day's bone-crackling 34-below temperature has yielded to a warming trend; the mercury nears zero and snow has begun falling. By midafternoon, two inches of fresh powder dust the landscape, a silvery mural of meadows and snow-sagged fir trees.

Inside the Chinook Charter School, children learn in a casual but focused environment created by four teachers who are living a dream. "I remember all of us years ago saying how incredible it would be if we all taught in the same school," says Janelle McCrackin, one of the founders of the Chinook Charter School. "Now we do, and it's been great."

But the road to creating the first charter school in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District has been filled with speed bumps, potholes, and soft shoulders. At times, notes Terri Austin, another of the school's founders, the exit signs looked awfully appealing. Fortunately, Austin adds, when the process wore her down, McCrackin would pick her up, brush her off, and get her back on track. The support was mutual among those working to begin a charter school in less than 12 months.

"It took a lot of work," Austin says. "It took a year of our lives to get this together. We were working 14 to 18 hours a day for a year."

"It was the toughest thing I've ever done," adds McCrackin, who has two young children at home. "It was so incredibly difficult."

McCrackin, Austin, and fellow Chinook teachers Annemarie Keep-Barnes and Barbara Smith were all full-time teachers while they were struggling to lay the foundation for the Chinook School. They had to write a charter, organize a nonprofit board of directors, find a school site that met building codes, bring prospective parents and students into their community, address concerns of the Fairbanks Education Association, and address state and district guidelines.

It was also costly, with McCrackin and Austin spending thousands of dollars of their own money to get the school going. The bulk of the money was spent on building inspections and architectural and legal fees, but printing, research, professional development, and other costs also mounted.

"We went through at least five potential sites—including a meat-packing plant—before landing where we are," Austin says. Each site had to be inspected to ensure that it met plumbing, electrical, structural, and other codes. All those costs had to be paid up front by the founders of the charter school. "We had to have an approved site before we could submit a charter," Austin says. "And we had to bear the costs of finding an approved site."

The search for a site continues. Chinook Charter School is tucked into a wing of the Tanana Satellite School on the Fort Wainwright Army installation in Fairbanks. But a bulge in student enrollment at the Tanana School next year could push Chinook out of the building. Austin, McCrackin, and Keep-Barnes have purchased land for a school, but constructing a new building is somewhere in the distant future.

The process of starting a charter school has been exhausting, exciting, educational, and, in the end, rewarding. "We were extremely naïve when we started," says Austin. "We didn't know how to write a charter, how to approach the school board, how to deal with building inspectors. We had to learn so much so fast. But now we have our own school."

McCrackin adds that while the process was tough, it also helped her and her colleagues focus on what they wanted for their school. "I wouldn't change a thing about the process we went through," she says. "It was a chance to turn the dream into reality."

And that process—actually creating a charter school—is a blur of memories for the teachers at Chinook. There were late-night meetings. Frequent philosophical discussions. Legal considerations. Community-building. Charter-writing marathons. Meetings with school board members, district administrators, union officials, state department representatives, legislators, and others.

In the summer of 1996, the four Chinook teachers also attended an education conference in East Sussex, England, then traveled in a van for three weeks together. "That was a turning point for all of us," Austin says. "We were able to spend three weeks together traveling and talking about our school."

Chinook teacher Barbara Smith agrees. "That was extremely significant," she says. "Four teachers spent four weeks together in England talking about their school. We knew that we already shared common philosophies about teaching and learning, so this allowed us to explore in detail how our visions would work on a day-to-day basis."

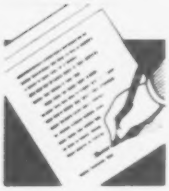
Ongoing communication and sharing a philosophical base has been part of the foundation for the Chinook Charter School, which serves 75 children in grades K-8 and has another 130 families on a waiting list. Students are selected by lottery, and there is a provision that allows siblings to attend. "We don't want to get bigger," Austin says. "We wouldn't be able to provide the individual attention to students and families if we had 120 or 130 students."

While the school was still in its formative stages, the founders used an apartment as a base for their work. Each Saturday for six weeks, the apartment served as a gathering place for prospective parents and founders of the school. About 20 parents participated in a series of topical discussions that helped them to understand, contribute to, and help shape Chinook. Participants read about and discussed issues such as multiage classrooms, teachers as change agents, cooperative learning, and ways to empower students. A second round of discussions drew an additional 35 families to the 8 a.m. Saturday meetings.

"The purpose," says Austin, "was to share our philosophy of Chinook and to hear the parents' ideas and expectations. It was a learning experience for everyone involved."

That type of communication and attention to detail has continued among teachers, parents, and students at Chinook. For example, each week, students write an open-topic letter home to their parents or other family members. Each teacher at Chinook also writes to each student's family weekly, and the families respond to the letters of students and teachers. The letters can be about how children are doing in school—what they're learning, how they're progressing, where they need additional attention—but they are not limited to school topics.

The letters are one piece of the family involvement component



that Chinook founders feel is critical to the success of their school. Other evidence of the importance of family involvement is visible throughout the school, where photos of students and their families decorate bulletin boards in the hallways. In addition, two display cases in the school's common area prominently feature a different family each week. The family arranges an exhibit that tells something about themselves: where the parents work, what they do for entertainment, how they play together. Family artwork and other memorabilia are included, too. Families also sign up to provide daily snacks in the classrooms. And another bulletin board provides space for family members to sign up for short- or long-term volunteering, to thank a teacher or student, or for teachers and students to thank families or each other.

"Family involvement is very important," notes Smith. "But what's extremely important is that we all be talking together. We talk with kids. We talk with parents. We talk with each other."

That openness also helped Chinook founders in their efforts to establish their school. They worked cooperatively with district administrators and with the Fairbanks Education Association (FEA), the union that represents the more than 1,000 certified staff in the district. Bill Bjork, president of the association, says the relationship with Chinook teachers has been excellent. "These are four master teachers who have put together a charter proposal that is the blueprint for charter schools across Alaska," he says. "We worked very amicably with them to identify areas of our contract that presented concerns."

One of the primary concerns was that of hiring teachers as openings occur at Chinook. The FEA waived a provision of its contract with the district that requires that schools hire from within the district before opening the process to new candidates. At Chinook, openings are posted districtwide, but the school is permitted to hire from outside if it does not find the right candidate from within the district. "At Chinook, they want somebody who is going to fit into the philosophy of their school," Bjork says. "You have to understand, this is a charter that we really want to see work."

Chinook is built on a foundation that respects children as learners and demands that all who participate be a part of their learning community. And the school's four teachers—Austin, McCrackin, Smith, and Keep-Barnes—are conscientious practitioners who draw from research, professional experiences, group discussions, and their intuitions about effective teaching and learning. "We discuss minute details of philosophy," McCrackin says. "Nothing is done by rote. Everything we do relates to a vision for our school. We even discuss recess and how it fits in with our philosophy."

A photo that appeared in a Fairbanks newspaper when Chinook was about to open exemplifies the school's nontraditional approach. The photo showed teacher Keep-Barnes standing in a sea of individual student desks stacked floor to ceiling. "The irony," she notes, "is that we don't use desks here. So they all had to be moved out."

Chinook Charter School stretches the traditional concept of public schooling, then reaches beyond even the nontraditional to create a unique approach to learning in kindergarten through eighth grade. There are no textbooks at Chinook, and students take only those standardized tests that are required by the state. Instead, students learn through literature-based activities, hands-on exploration, group and individual projects, and reading and writing activities. Assessment is ongoing and involves portfolios, individual work reviews between teachers and students, teacher anecdotal records, student performances, oral presentations, written exams, and art projects.

Students are divided into three "family groups"—novice (K-2), apprentice (3-5), and pioneer (6-8). Children work on literacy and math lessons in the morning, then shift to learning labs in science, social studies, arts, and math in the afternoon. Multiage groupings in the learning labs unite children from all age levels.

After school, parent-led classes permit students to explore lessons in Russian, field biology, cross-country running, arts and crafts, and other areas. "At Chinook, we are concerned with the total development of the child," the school's founders note in a written statement. "We believe that academic growth is positively influenced by a warm, caring, and nurturing environment. We are committed to individualized education which provides varying degrees of challenge."

Students are aware of the special place they hold in their school. The day often begins with teacher Annie Keep-Barnes strumming her guitar while children raise their voices in song. "What I really like about this school," says fifth-grader Vivian Taves, "is that we learn in fun ways. And another thing: You get to choose what you want to learn. I do the work that I feel I'm ready for, and so does everybody else. Some kids in my group are doing pre-algebra, but I feel like I need more work on fractions. So that's what I'm doing. I'll move on when I feel ready."

There are things that some students miss at Chinook that were available to them at other schools they attended. Ten-year-old Eden Koko says she misses physical education class and participating in orchestra. "But I also know that if I was going to my old school, I wouldn't get the things that I'm getting here," she says while answering phones in the office one day. "I'm able to learn at my own pace and to be responsible for my own learning. If I don't understand something, I can spend more time on it, and I like that. The teachers give us a lot of freedom, but they still make sure we're doing things and that we're learning."

Students, note teachers at Chinook, are capable of setting their own timetable for learning. "We're not measuring the kids against each other or some external criteria," says Keep-Barnes. "It's OK for them to go ahead with their learning when they feel they're ready, and it's OK for them to continue learning where they are."

Austin says that traditional schools too often are governed by clocks and strict timetables that push children to new lessons before they have mastered the materials in front of them. "Right now," Austin says, "we've got a student who is developmentally younger than the others. I'm not worried about that. We've got time. These are my kids, and I'm going to see them year after year. I am committed to them and to their families."

The Chinook Charter School has given four teachers a rare opportunity: to practice their profession in the ways that they believe are most beneficial to children. "There is a tremendous sense of strength and stability that comes from sharing a common philosophy," McCrackin says. And while it is not unheard of for individual teachers to share a common philosophy in a traditional school, it is uncommon for them to be able to put together those views in a schoolwide approach to learning.

"In a traditional school," says Smith, "you might find two or three teachers out of 30 who truly share a philosophy. But it's really impossible for them to get together because of time constraints, class schedules, grade structures, or a lack of administrative support. Here, we all share our philosophy and have been involved in establishing a vision."

Austin sees charter schools as a way of empowering teachers and communities. "The idea behind a charter school," she says, "is that your community comes together to define a need. The idea of having a choice of where to send your child to school, I think, is very important. Some school districts are very good at providing choices. Some are not.

"But if a school district wants to truly invigorate its teachers, then it should offer them a school of their own," Austin says. "This experience has taught me that nothing is impossible, that when things get most difficult, you can set your jaw and keep on going."

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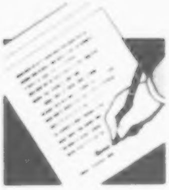


Basic Training

A DETERMINED GROUP OF PARENTS FIGHT FOR A TRADITIONAL SCHOOL

PHOENIX, Arizona—Scott Jackson paid a visit to Valley Academy last summer, just after a rain squall had drenched the surrounding desert. The consultant treaded carefully between the puddles toward the compound of military-gray, double-wide modulars. The one-year-old, back-to-basics charter school had no pavement, no playground, and no principal.

"It was muddy, it was sloshy, and it was a horrendous mess," Jackson recalls.

The mud hole that served as Valley Academy's parking lot that first year was a visual symbol of the quagmire of financial troubles, regulatory nightmares, and personnel flare-ups that threatened to shut down the school even before the first students arrived. Funds were delayed. Three board members walked off the job. Parents pulled their children out. The state audited the books. The press ran story after story about the school's tribulations.

But the little compound in the desert held firm. Today, fresh asphalt—paid for with state transportation money—covers the parking lot. Scott Jackson occupies the principal's office, from which he can see monkey bars funded by a state grant and landscaping planted by a crew of parents. Valley Academy survived its first stormy year to become "one of Arizona's charter school success stories," according to Kathy Haas, charter schools administrator for the state education department.

Arizona's charter schools law wasn't on the books when a group of parents and teachers started meeting in Cuyler (say KY-LER) Reid's living room six years ago. With a child's Fisher-Price chalkboard as a visual aid, the group huddled for discussions about the new language arts curriculum Deer Valley School District had adopted. Out among the industrial parks, housing developments, and shopping malls of Phoenix's booming northwest end, Deer Valley, like many districts nationwide, has moved away from phonics, basal readers, and rote learning. Drawing on research on developmentally appropriate practice, the district had adopted a whole-language, discovery-based curriculum.

But Reid and her husband Thomas, along with a growing cadre of like-minded parents, were uncomfortable with an approach to learning that to them seemed dangerously unstructured. Where were the phonics drills? The lined paper? The penmanship practice? What about spelling tests? Homework?

These were the questions the group began raising with the school board. They came armed with research findings that supported their belief in a traditional reading-and-writing curriculum.

The school board, Cuyler Reid says, stonewalled. "Imagine a real friendly war going on," she says, laughing.

The battle raged for four years, with volleys exchanged not only in school board meetings but also on the editorial pages of the *Arizona Republic*. At times the war veered from friendly to nasty. A few parents even got phone messages saying, "'Watch out—we've got guns,'" Reid recalls. "It really was a very heated debate. When you get into educational philosophy, it becomes very heated. These are our children we're talking about, and our children's futures.

"We wanted some validation as educated people who've done research, as parents making choices—parents who have a right to have some say in their children's education."

In 1994, just when the Reids were about to give up and send their daughter to a private school, Arizona passed its charter schools law. The law looked tailor-made for this group of back-to-basics parents. They had honed their message in countless school board meetings. They had scoured libraries, consulted experts, and solidified their thinking in a four-year effort to influence the school district. They had a vision of the school they wanted for their children. So they submitted an application to operate a charter school under district sponsorship. But just to be safe, they took advantage of the law's flexibility in sponsorship and submitted a second application to the state Board of Education. (Arizona, with one of the nation's most liberal charter laws, has created a state board for charter schools that offers yet another sponsorship option for start-ups.)

The day before the Deer Valley board was scheduled to vote on Valley Academy, a back-to-basics parent was lunching at a local restaurant. She overheard a board member in the next booth telling a PTA member that the charter would never pass. But by that time, it was a moot point: The state board had given Valley Academy its blessing. (The Deer Valley School Board voted down the charter school the following night.)

That was January 1995. The Reids and their fellow founders quickly signed up more than 900 students for the fall. But elation turned to consternation as the founders dug into the gritty details of turning a vision into a school. Backed by a detailed business plan and a line of credit from a bank, plus background checks and resumes for board members, they tried to lease a parcel of land. They ran into resistance and roadblocks everywhere. "We became experts in zoning," Cuyler Reid says, adding, "I was surprised at how many people didn't want children on their property."

By July, they were getting desperate. "We'd drive for hours and hours and hours," she recalls. "Every time we'd find vacant land we'd call about it. We found a couple of places that looked good, would probably have been excellent for a school, but because of the rules and regs—we would have to do neighborhood surveys, for instance—we were looking at a minimum of three months.

"There are so many rules and regs and so much money that has to be put down," she laments. "And if you don't know somebody, it's so easy to be put on the bottom of the list for inspections and such."

Ultimately, it was "knowing somebody" that got them their little piece of desert. A parent who worked for Honeywell pushed through a lease agreement for a 10-acre parcel owned by the electronics giant. "We accomplished in a few weeks what normally would have taken about a year and a half," says Reid. "There had to be corporate willingness. Lots of people who didn't know us went out on a limb to speed up the process."

They got their plot. But, like weary hikers who think the trail is leveling off, only to find another peak towering around the bend, the charter starters soon found themselves facing new challenges.

"One of the first things that became evident," Reid says, "was that planning and zoning departments could shut down the whole charter school movement. We had to have permits to break ground, permits to dig trenches, permits to cover the trenches, permits to get the building zoned."

While wading neck-deep through local land-use laws and building codes and paying overtime wages to round-the-clock workers, the would-be school hit another snag. State dollars earmarked for Valley Academy students—the same dollars that would have followed them had they enrolled in public schools—were delayed by three weeks. Funds that should have been released in July didn't arrive until August.

"There was never any official reason given to us," Reid says.

September rolled around, and still the doors remained closed as parents spent evenings frantically cleaning classrooms and setting up used desks, bookshelves, and filing cabinets. Some of the furnishings were donated by Honeywell. Others were bought from another district at bargain-basement prices—50 cents for chairs, $5 for a box of books. Meanwhile, Valley Academy teachers were sending lessons home for the waiting charter students.

By the time the school finally opened on September 25, enrollment had plunged. Spooked by the school's start-up struggles, parents of some 300 prospective students had sent their kids elsewhere. When state dollars finally flowed into Valley Academy's coffers, fewer than 600 kids showed up for the first day of classes.

But the school's woes were far from over. In October, city building inspectors cited the school for violating a number of building-safety requirements, such as providing security lights, lanes for fire trucks, and access for people with disabilities, the *Arizona Republic* reported. County health inspectors found restrooms that needed toilet paper and soap, and cited the school for operating without a county health permit.

In November, the school ran out of cash. One day, Reid spotted a TV camera crew outside the school. "I thought, 'This is great. We're getting some publicity,'" she recalls. The publicity, it turned out, was not the kind she had hoped for. A Valley Academy parent had called a press conference to announce that the school was in dire financial straits and was in imminent danger of closing. By the next day, news of the school's money crunch was splashed all over the media, and the bank shut down the school's credit line.

On Christmas Eve, Jim Weiers, a Republican legislator with four children attending Valley Academy, loaned the school $100,000 to keep it afloat for a month. But the state, "under immense pressure to do something *now*," in Reid's words, sent a team of auditors to scrutinize the school's books. Their findings: The school had failed to comply with the requirements of the Unified System of Financial Reporting (the rules that all public entities must abide by) in 27 areas—"everything from controlling inventory to purchasing bookkeeping services," Reid reports. "They said nobody had done anything wrong, we had just done everything the wrong way."

A group of retired businesspeople plunged into the school's books and began sorting through the tangled records. The Executive Service Corps of Arizona (ESCOA), the state chapter of a national association set up to help nonprofit corporations, sent a team that included a certified public accountant, an administrative architect, and a bank manager to straighten things out. Their charge: only $3,500 for what Reid describes as "countless hours of work."

But meanwhile, other troubles were brewing. When Reid drove up to the school feeling hopeful after her first meeting with ESCOA, a sign posted on the door stuck a pin in her optimism: EMERGENCY BOARD MEETING, it blared in bold black letters. Three of the six board members had resigned. Reid will say only that "differences in how to run a business and how to approach problems" caused the rift. "Some of it was philosophical, some of it strictly business, some of it personal," she says. "It was a very hurtful time."

In a letter to other board members, the three who quit said they were stepping down to "bring to an end the existing state of conflict, friction, division, and stalemate of the board," the *Arizona Republic* reported.

The split came after the founding parents had endured months of tri-weekly board meetings, late-night work sessions, and close scrutiny from press and public. "By the time you've been through as much physically as we had, everybody was totally exhausted," she says. "That's not when you're the most open to calm, sane solutions."

A self-described "Air Force brat" with a degree in secondary English education and nine years of classroom experience, Cuyler Reid is skeptical about school reform trends that stress process over content.

"I believe very strongly that your goal is to be a good thinker," she says. "But if you don't have information and knowledge with which to think, it's like having a computer without any software. I really believe in building a strong academic base and then, as that base gets stronger, you start bringing in the thinking skills and such."

Visitors can see Reid's rejection of current reform ideas in Valley

Academy's highly regimented classroom culture. Students wear uniforms of starched white and crisp navy. They sit in straight rows, facing front. To rapid-fire flash cards, they recite vowel sounds and consonant blends in unison. Classes are small (19 students in kindergarten rooms, 21 in first grade, 22 in second grade, 23 in third grade). Enrollment continued to dwindle the first year, finally stabilizing at about 455 K-9 students who are served by 40 employees, 31 of whom are teachers. About 25 percent of the school's students had been in home schools or private schools, Reid estimates. As of February 24, 1996, the school had received $2.2 million in state funds, according to the *Arizona Republic*.

With the "granddaddy" of traditional schools—the Benjamin Franklin School of Mesa, Arizona—as a model, Reid and her fellow founders felt confident in their educational mission. But when they traded their educators' hats for business hats, they struggled.

"One of the areas that we were really ignorant in was running a business," Reid confesses. Despite a bachelor's degree in science education, a master's in public administration, and 18 years of experience running hospital laboratories, Thomas Reid, who was named CEO of Valley Academy, found himself overwhelmed in the early stages. "The job we were asking him and Patty (the secretary) to do is now being done by one, two, three, four, five, six full-time people and a half-time person," Cuyler Reid says as she mentally ticks off the administrative staff members. "And even at that, nobody has a slack day."

She has a long list of ideas that would smooth the start-up process for new charter schools. Here are a few:

- **On laying the groundwork: Local officials need to be informed about charter schools when they first appear in a community. Otherwise, charter founders are apt to get the "bureaucratic run-around," says Reid. "Charter schools were a new entity, and people didn't know how to deal with them. They were confused about whether charter schools are public or private, and they didn't have procedures firmed up." When Arizona education department staff, along with several state legislators and charter school experts, called on city officials to explain the charter schools concept and law, they paved the way for more cooperation and understanding, Reid says.**
- **On working with the powers that be:** Reid and her co-founders suggest doing "a mental turnaround" in dealing with local and state agencies that may seem uncooperative. Instead of seeing officials and their rules as roadblocks, Reid came to view them as partners. "It's so frustrating when you're trying to do something and someone is in your way, and you think maybe it's deliberate," she says. "But they've got their own set of requirements they have to meet. So we said, 'OK, we're going to work with these people and engage their help.' When we changed our attitude, they changed their attitude."
- **On initial costs:** States should offer short-term, low-interest loans to new charter schools for start-up costs. "We have no capital," she says. "Everything has to come out of maintenance and operations. If you're not in an area where there are a lot of abandoned buildings, there has to be some way to get started—presuming you want the public to be involved in it. Otherwise, you have to have a business or deep pockets behind you."
- **On structuring the organization:** "Looking at charter schools nationwide, many problems come from internal conflict," Reid stresses. "Before you open up, everybody should understand what their rights and responsibilities are. You need job descriptions. It's a good idea to look to arbitration before you look to lawyers. It's a good idea to have some outside sources that are not emotionally involved that you can go to for guidance and direction."

Rather than viewing charter schools as threats, school districts such as Deer Valley should view them as tools, Reid says.

"What Deer Valley does, they do very well," Reid maintains. "But you're never going to please all the people. When you have a significant minority, if you have safety valves or steam vents, then instead of fighting to see who wins what, you're really doing what needs to be done for the children. I hope that's where charter schools end up."

—LEE SHERMAN CAUDELL

ON NOVEMBER 29, 1995, *EDUCATION WEEK* PUBLISHED AN INDEPTH SPECIAL REPORT on the charter schools movement. "Breaking Away: The Charter School Revolution" traces the growth of the charter schools movement from a "hazy educational notion" to a "legislative juggernaut." The 16-page report takes readers inside charter schools in Minneapolis and Boston, and shows them the dreams of prospective founders in Arizona. It compares the power of various states' charter school laws to spur real change in the public school system. And it provides a list of organizations and reports relating to charter schools. To order a copy of the report, send $4 to: "Breaking Away: The Charter School Revolution," Education Week Special Reports, 4301 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 250, Washington, DC 20008.

Other special reports on charter schools have appeared recently in *Phi Delta Kappan* (September 1996) and in *Educational Leadership* (October 1996).

An article in *Education Week* on November 6, 1996, titled "Under the Microscope" looks at what the editors call the "big question": Do charter schools work? The writer offers a good analysis of the issues and obstacles researchers are dealing with as they attempt to discover whether the investment in charter schools is paying dividends.

An article from the mainstream press offers a lay-person's perspective on the charter schools movement. See "A Class of Their Own" in *Time* magazine, October 31, 1994.

IN A REPORT FROM THE HUDSON INSTITUTE, *CHARTER SCHOOLS IN ACTION: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?*, Chester Finn, Bruno Manno, and Louann Bierlein present the findings of the first year of a two-year study of U.S. charter schools. The study focuses on start-up problems, solutions to those problems, and the policy environments in which such schools are most apt to thrive or falter. The report includes five major sections. After an introduction and overview, it looks at highlights and accomplishments of a national sampling of charter schools; explores significant start-up problems many charter schools have encountered; considers charter-related dilemmas faced by policymakers; and offers conclusions and recommendations. The study found that more than 80 percent of charter school students had previously been enrolled in public schools, 8 percent came from private schools, 2 percent were home schooled, and 4 percent had dropped out. The researchers also found that more than half of the charter students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; almost one in five have limited English proficiency; almost two-thirds are members of minority groups; and almost one in five has a disability or learning problem. To order, send $5 to: Hudson Institute, Herman Kahn Center, P.O. Box 26-919, Indianapolis, IN 46226, 1-800-483-7660, http://www.edexcellence.net

THE U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE PUTS CHARTER SCHOOLS UNDER THE MICROSCOPE in its 1995 report *Charter Schools: New Model for Public Schools Provides Opportunities and Challenges*. The report answers these questions:

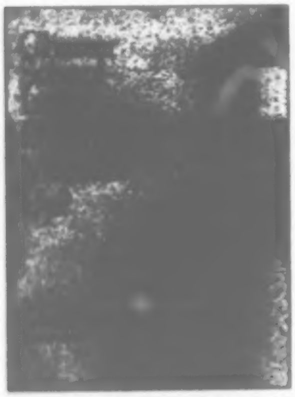
- How many charter schools have been approved under state laws?
- What characterizes charter schools' instructional programs?
- How autonomously do charter schools operate and what influences their autonomy?
- How are charter schools held accountable for student performance?
- What challenges do charter schools pose for federal education programs?

Order the report from the U.S. General Accounting Office, P.O. Box 6015, Gaithersburg, MD 20884-6015, (202) 512-6000. The first copy is free; each additional copy is $2.

OFFERING A GOOD OVERVIEW OF ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST CHARTER SCHOOLS is *Charter Schools 1995: A Survey and Analysis of the Laws and Practices of the States* by Thomas Mauhs-Pugh of Dartmouth College. The report also provides a state-by-state rundown of charter activity, cross-state comparisons, descriptions of existing and proposed schools, and an analysis of lessons learned. Extensive bibliographic citations are offered. Access the document through the World Wide Web at http:// olam.ed.asu.edu/

paa/v3n13. Other online resources include the Center for Educational Reform's Web site, which offers information on contact people at the state and federal levels; a listing of organizations involved with charter schools; and a listing of charter schools events. Go to http://www.edreform.com, where you also will find the *National Charter School Directory*, which lists all currently operating charter schools by state and offers a brief description of each, along with contact information. For a paper copy of the directory, send $9.95 to: Center for Education Reform, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 204, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 822-9000.

America Online provides a lively charter schools forum (keyword: charter). For more information, contact Frank Dooling at afcfrank@aol.com.



THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS WEIGHS IN ON THE ISSUE in its 1996 publication *Charter School Laws: Do They Measure Up?* The report examines the charter legislation in 25 states in an effort to assess whether these laws are likely to yield high-quality schools. The federation defines "good" charter legislation as that which "protects the public interest and the integrity of public education." It defines "bad" legislation as that which "encourages charter schools to become the basis of an alternative school system created for a few, but operating at the expense of many." For a copy of the report, send $10 to: American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20001-2079, attention Order Department, (202) 879-4400.

ASPIRING CHARTER SCHOOL OPERATORS WILL FIND A WEALTH OF USEFUL INFORMATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS in a report from the University of Washington and the RAND Institute for Education and Training. The report, *So You Want to Start a Charter School? Strategic Advice for Applicants*, is the product of a 1995 workshop sponsored by the Program on Reinventing Public Education, which brought together 12 experts to explore start-up issues. Bankers, lawyers, insurance experts, and others who have worked with charter school applicants nationwide offer tidbits of wisdom and practical information in a variety of critical areas, including:

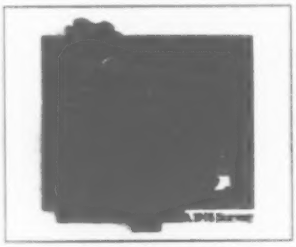
- Nonprofit technical support organizations
- Dealing with opposition and the media
- Group decisionmaking
- Finding a building
- Liability, insurance, and risk management
- Special education
- Contracting for services
- Admissions and marketing
- Financial planning
- Legal representation
- Business management
- Conflicts of interest

Copies of the report are available for $3 from: Program on Reinventing Public Education, Institute for Public Policy and Management, Box 353060, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195, (206) 685-2214.

JOE NATHAN, DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR SCHOOL CHANGE AT THE HUBERT H. HUMPHREY INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, has written a comprehensive book called *Charter Schools: Creating Hope and Opportunity for American Education* (October 1996). The book provides advice to those thinking of founding a charter school and includes resources on state laws, contact people, and online resources. Nathan, a former award-winning public school educator, draws upon nationwide surveys, research, and visits to dozens of charter schools to answer such questions as, Who starts charter schools? What kinds of students attend? Are charter schools using ideas and techniques other schools can and should learn from? Are these schools actually helping students? Are charter schools having an impact on the larger system? The book also explains why both liberals and conservatives, including people who oppose vouchers, support the charter approach.

Writes the author: "*Charter Schools* is intended for school administrators and teachers who are already active in a charter school, thinking of starting a charter school, or working in a district that is or will be granting authorizations to these schools. It is also intended for members of school boards at both state and local levels. Finally, it is designed to inform and assist parents and community members who are involved with an existing charter school, are in the process of planning such a school, or are simply considering whether a charter school is appropriate for their children or their community."

To order the book, send $25 plus $5.50 for shipping, to Jossey-Bass Publishers,350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, CA 94104, 1-888-378-2537.



THE EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES HAS PUBLISHED THE FINDINGS OF A STUDY DESIGNED TO GATHER AND SHARE THE BEST AVAILABLE INFORMATION ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOLS. The report, *Charter Schools: What Are They Up To?* describes the experiences of 110 charter schools in seven states. Among the key findings are:

- Most charter schools are small.
- Two-thirds are designed to serve a cross section of students.
- One-half are designed to serve at-risk students.
- The most frequently cited academic focus for charter schools is "integrated interdisciplinary curriculum." The second most popular focus is "technology," followed by "back to basics."
- The most frequently cited reasons for chartering a school were

"better teaching and learning for all kids," "running a school according to certain principles and philosophy" and "exploring innovative ways of running a school."

- "Leased commercial space" is the most frequent description of the schools' location.

To order, send $10 to: ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th Street, Suite 2700 Denver, CO 80202-3427, (303) 299-3692 (ask for item number SI-95-1).

THE SOUTHWEST REGIONAL LABORATORY OFFERS AN EARLY LOOK AT CALIFORNIA'S CHARTER SCHOOL EXPERIMENT in its report *Vision and Reality* by Marcella Dianda and Ronald Corwin. As the second state to enact charter school legislation, California's experience can prove instructive to states that are drafting or considering such legislation, the authors note. The report discusses the parameters of California's legislation, the characteristics of California's charter schools, and the factors that may affect the number of schools created, among other topics. Based upon their findings, the authors offer recommendations for strengthening charter schools in the state. To order a copy of the report, send $14.95 to: WestEd, 730 Harrison Street, San Francisco, CA 94107, Attention Tom Ross. Another lab in the regional laboratory network, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, has issued two charter schools reports, *Redefining Educational Governance: The Charter School Concept* ($7) and "Charter Schools: Early Learnings" in the *Insights* series of policy papers, July 1995 ($6.50). To order, contact: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 211 E. Seventh Street, Austin, TX 78701, (512) 476-6861.

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE NORTHWEST SYMPOSIUM FOR CHARTER SCHOOL POLICY held in Portland, Oregon, in November 1996 have been published under the title *Charter Schools at the Crossroads: A Northwest Perspective* (see "Charter for Change" beginning on Page 2 for excerpts of the report.) Moderators for the NWREL-sponsored event were Douglas Thomas of the Center for School Change and Lori Mulholland of the Morrison Institute for Public Policy. Included in the report are the papers that Mulholland and Thomas presented at the symposium. Thomas answers such policy questions as: How do charter schools fit into the larger policy picture of school choice? Who should sponsor charter schools? How much money should follow the charter? Mulholland looks at the latest research on charter schools, offers caveats about interpreting that research, and describes a number of studies in the pipeline. To order the report, send $13.80 to: Document Reproduction Service, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204.

A Northwest Snapshot

Continued from Page 11

schools program, which allows teachers and parents to design educational programs and apply for waivers of certain state rules and regulations.

Washington. Although Washington has no charter schools bill on the books, statewide school reform laws allow for the creation of charterlike schools, according to Lee Ann Prielipp of the Washington Education Association. Under existing laws, waivers of state regulations are available, alternative schools may be created, accountability is mandated, and open enrollment allows any student to attend any school in the state. In 1996, Washington voters defeated a bill that would have allowed state dollars to be funneled to independently operated schools. While its sponsors called it a variation on a charter schools bill, opponents, including the Washington Education Association, argued that the bill lacked the basic ingredient of a true charter school: a binding contract ("charter") between the school and its sponsor that would ensure accountability. Meanwhile, the state education department is looking at providing technical assistance to districts that want to start charter schools, according to Jean Ameluxen. In 1997 legislators will consider several charter schools bills being drafted by the Senate, the House, and the Business Roundtable.

Wyoming. Although Wyoming has a charter schools law on the books, the charter schools movement has not yet taken hold in the state, according to Roger Hammer of the state education department. "There's not a whole lot of demand for charter schools," Hammer noted. While no charters currently exist, there are a number of "schools of choice" and alternative schools in the largest 10 of the state's 49 districts. The state's vast, thinly populated rural areas may spawn "regional charters," which could pull students from a 30- to 40-mile radius in remote areas, Hammer predicted. ■

A Guide for Organizing and Assisting Charter Schools (New school start-ups)

Phase 1: Organizing and obtaining charter
(minimum of 1 year)

Process Steps
(1) Recruit planners. The planning group should include a cross section of teachers, community leaders, parents of prospective students, representatives from business, prospective students, and experienced charter school specialists, if possible.
(2) Develop the scope, purpose, and description of the school. The corporation and its planners should spend at least six months of regular (weekly) meetings on this phase, which should include the development of the letter of intent required by most laws and the larger design plan for the school.
(3) Negotiate further partnerships to support planning and development.
(4) Identify potential sponsors.
(5) Begin to work with other educational agencies, such as postsecondary institutions.
(6) Define the role of various organizations and establish the legal entity of the charter school group (for example, nonprofit corporation, cooperative, private enterprise).
(7) Prepare a time line.
(8) Provide information and publicity, both formally and informally.
(9) Request sponsorship and prepare all documentation as required.
(10) Receive sponsorship and authorization.
Budget for Phase 1: $5,000 to $10,000

Phase 2: Planning for start-up (6-12 months)

Process Steps
(1) Identify and convene a "design team," including members of the original planning team and educational design professionals.
(2) Visit and confer with other charter schools and charter school organizers.
(3) Further develop the design plan.
(4) Provide leadership in the development of curriculum, assessment, and evaluation.
(5) Provide leadership in the organizational structure and governance of the school.
(6) Locate and secure facilities and capital equipment.
(7) Initiate provisions and procedures for school funding.
(8) Develop a financial management operations system or explore contract to do so.
(9) Develop a marketing plan for public information and recruitment of parents and students.
(10) Continue to develop outside resources and further partnerships.
(11) Recruit and hire appropriate staff.
(12) Purchase technology, supplies, and equipment.
Budget for Phase 2: $1,000 per student (from other sources)

Phase 3: Start-up
(1st year of operation)

Considerations
(1) Secure additional funding and pursue further partnerships.
(2) Manage media and information dissemination.
(3) Implement assessment and evaluation procedures.
(4) Continue planning and development work with committees and design team.
(5) Assist with communication between parents, staff, agencies, and sponsor.
(6) Assist with developing problems and start-up difficulties.
(7) Work with newly elected governance body.
(8) Assist in planning for expansion if appropriate.
Phase 3 Budget: $300 per student in addition to per-pupil revenue

Source: Douglas Thomas, Center for School Change, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute, University of Minnesota.

FIRST PERSON

IT STARTED WITH A PASSION FOR NEIGHBORHOOD and a desire to keep open an older middle school in the heart of that neighborhood. It grew into a campaign for educational change by putting a new school into an old building.

The charter school we envision for the "old" Leslie Middle School in the Salem/Keizer School District will, we believe, enhance rather than downgrade the neighborhood. After an inner-city school, where many of our children have been educated, was slated for closure, the possibility of developing an innovative, excellent school was our last best hope to keep this school open. In our view, the heart of a neighborhood is the school—a school from which young sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students can walk to school and back home.

Salem's near south side is a diverse neighborhood that brings many special qualities to the school. It is close to downtown. It includes some of our older and wealthier parts of town and some of our poorer and more troubled sections, as well as a range of socioeconomic groups in between. Salem's magnificent Bush's Pasture Park, where museums and art centers thrive in the homes of city pioneers, lies in the middle of our neighborhood and just a few blocks from the school. Homes and elementary schools adjacent to the Oregon State Penitentiary are there, too. It's the school, then, which binds families into neighborhood. The new school, miles away and where 70 percent of the children will be bused, loosens this tie.

Just as the school helps hold the neighborhood together, the neighborhood is part of the education of the school children. We believe it is true that it takes a whole village to raise a child.

Charter schools focus teachers, students, parents, and the wider community on students' needs. Teachers work in curriculum development, as professionals. Charter schools foster student choice. Students buy in to a curriculum when it's their choice; they make it work for them.

It's to maintain, or even add to, the strength of our neighborhood, our "village," that has motivated and nourished us through the years of long hours and frustrations that this project has brought with it. As voters and volunteers, we have always supported public education, the school board, and the schools. Some of us, but not all, are parents with children in the district. Some of us, but not all, have children at the age where they might attend the school when it opens. Some of us, but not all, have been classroom teachers in the district. Two are former school board members; another a former newspaper reporter on the education beat. Able to choose between a public school and private school education for our children, we chose to work within the public school system for the alternatives and excellence a charter school can provide middle school youngsters in our district.

WE KNOW WHAT EFFECT DEDICATED TEACHERS CAN HAVE on the development of our children. We want to create a learning place where that can happen. Charter schools give public schools the opportunity to show themselves at their innovative best.

Equal education doesn't need to be the same education. We're seeing a movement toward real local control. The city is made up of many neighborhoods and different people with different needs.

The vital elements of our curriculum are math/science, language (including second languages), and the arts. In recognition of each of these three areas, all of which are forms of language, we call our curriculum "Einstein, Ellington, and Esperanto."

But, at this stage of our school's development, its building blocks come from the community and the neighborhood. Artists offer to take children into their studios. In this way students will develop their talent and, at the same time, see where art comes from and how it is used. Science equipment, from Bunsen burners to lab tables, are offered by a university in the neighborhood. Even the neighboring high school, whose building abuts the middle school, offers students the potential of richer offerings. A major high-tech manufacturer, the city library, a children's science museum are attracted to the light given off by our idea for a school. This kind of community involvement will be as essential to our charter school's education after it's been opened for many years as it is to getting it started.

The possibilities we see from what has already happened in other parts of the state, the region, and even the nation energize our efforts. There will always be frustrations. Changing education in this country comes very slowly. But when there is communication, a shared vision, a shared definition of terms, change comes.

We all would like to see our school granted a license for risk-taking, even failure, to let the air come in, in a way that doesn't have to come as a challenge from the outside. We want our school to create a blueprint for what's possible. We want to show a district ready to try an alternative.

The Salem *Statesman-Journal* newspaper headlined its October 28, 1996, editorial, "Public Education Benefits from Charter School Plan," and went on to say, "We believe that it's important to provide a variety of educational venues—traditional public and private schools, home instruction, and now charter schools. Children can learn in many settings, and it makes sense to provide as many as Salem and Keizer can support."

Even at this early date in the development of our school, we've provided a vehicle for alternatives. To learn what alternatives there are is motivating. The biggest effect of our school will be to make it possible for other alternatives to emerge.

Our school emerged from a campaign to save our school and save our neighborhood. We intend to show the two, a school and its neighborhood, are inseparable.

—BENTLEY GILBERT

Bentley Gilbert is a public affairs consultant. Other founders are: Alan Boner, a mechanical engineer; Caryl Gertenrich, a retired teacher and a fabric artist; Pam Mattson, a management consultant, a former state agency director, and a board member for the Salem Schools Foundation; Sally Miller, a community volunteer and former teacher; Janet Tornquist, a travel consultant and former Salem/Keizer school board member; Beth Unverzagt, a staff member of a private school and a former school board member in Turner, Oregon.

NW

NORTHWEST EDUCATION

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Parents As Advocates: Mobilizing Support for Schools

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IN THIS ISSUE

Teaching Well

TEACHING AND TEACHERS PLAY PIVOTAL ROLES AS WE OPEN THE DOORS TO A NEW CENTURY

I don't really know if Bonnie Loufek and Nancy Sager were excellent teachers.

I do know that they had a powerful influence on me as I muddled through high school in the mid-sixties. They encouraged debate over issues of the day: from civil rights and the war in Vietnam to school dress codes and the Beatles. They asked their students to explore the world, rather than turn their backs on it. They helped us to think critically, judge sparingly, and act compassionately.

They were, by my reckoning, fine teachers who understood their kids and the radical changes they were confronting in themselves and society. They were transitional teachers, bridges between the passivity of the '50s and the activism of the '60s. They were strong influences on my later decisions to go to college and pursue a career in writing and education. I hope they continue to teach, because I believe they would still be good teachers—engaging, entertaining, and encouraging students to explore, to think, and to do.

Most people I talk with have similar tales about teachers. The ones they loved, and the ones they despised. Teachers are, after all, pivotal people in our lives. They can spark creativity, or they can douse it. They can open our minds to fresh ideas, or they can close them. They can nudge us toward newer heights, or they can hold us back.

Teaching and society are again at a crossroads. Rapid advances in technology have created vast new opportunities for teachers to network, to learn, and to teach. Educational research has helped teachers better understand the needs of students and provided strategies to address the individual learning styles of diverse student populations. And parents, business, labor, and others are increasingly involved in schools and education.

But these opportunities also create pressures for increased professional development, broader understanding of cultures, improved schools of education, and a willingness on the part of teachers to learn and grow professionally.

To be sure, the status quo no longer serves the needs of students and communities. "Today's society has little room for those who cannot read, write, and compute proficiently; find and use resources; frame and solve problems; and continually learn new technologies, skills, and occupations," notes the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. "America's future depends now, as never before, on our ability to teach."

In this issue of *Northwest Education*, we visit a school of education, talk with teachers recognized as among the best in the country, and hear about a faculty mentoring program in Montana.

Writing at the turn of the last century, educator W.E.B. DuBois noted, "Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled for 5,000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental." Today, the right to learn is intimately linked to the ability to teach well, to reach all students, and to instill a lifelong love of learning in young people. Teachers touch all of us sometime in our lives. And the ways in which teachers reach students will help shape society and steer all of us into the 21st century.

—Tony Kneidek
kneidekt@nwrel.org

Wan

Two million

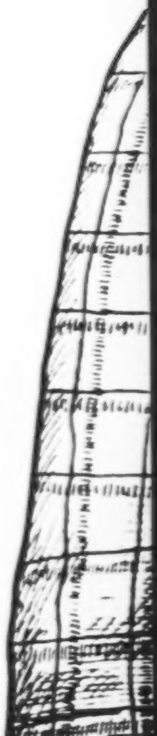
energetic,

articulate,

intelligent

professionals

We're looking for student-centered teachers who know their subject areas, understand child development, thrive on creative chaos, arbitrate disputes, respect everyone, juggle multiple tasks, are capable of navigating in technological worlds, and work well with colleagues, parents, the business community, service organizations, organized labor, church groups, administrators, students, social service agencies, and others. Candidates should be well-versed in research-based school reform strategies including, but not limited to, cooperative learning, multicultural approaches in the classroom, developmentally appropriate practices, school-to-work initiatives, experiential learning, community service, multiple intelligences, conflict resolution, and parent involvement. Master's degree and minimum of one year professional or supervised experience required.



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Ne[illegible] women and men teach more than 50 million students in America's K-12 schools. In the next 10 years, about two million more teachers will be hired. Will these new teachers—and those who are in the classrooms today—be prepared to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population and the demands of increasingly vocal disparate groups? Perhaps, but only if teacher education and professional development efforts address some of the issues that persist.

Teacher education, long the stepchild in education reform efforts, is undergoing the glare of national attention. "I urge sustained attention to the task of preparing America's future teachers," U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley said in his 1997 "State of American Education" address. Riley decried the status of teacher education, noting deficiencies in recruiting—both in general terms, and of minority candidates in particular—in underfunded and undervalued schools of education, and in the lack of mentoring offered new teachers in America's schools.

"We will never have 'A' students," the secretary said, "if we can only give ourselves a 'C' as a nation when it comes to preparing tomorrow's teachers. We cannot lower our standards—as we have in the past—to meet the growing demand for new teachers."

In a two-year study of teaching and teacher preparation, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future identified some disturbing barriers to sound teaching and learning, including:

- Low expectations for student performance
- Unenforced standards for teachers
- Major flaws in teacher preparation
- Slipshod teacher recruitment
- Inadequate induction for beginning teachers
- Lack of professional development and rewards for knowledge and skill
- Schools structured for failure rather than success

The commission calls for widespread and systemic changes in teacher preparation, standards, recruitment, and professional development. "We propose an audacious goal for America's future," write the authors of *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*. "Within a decade—by the year 2006—we will provide every student in America with what should be his or her educational birthright: access to competent, caring, qualified teaching in schools organized for success."

The tools, strategies, and knowledge to reach that goal, the commission maintains, are all in place. "Common sense suffices," the commission says. "American students are entitled to teachers who know their subjects, understand their students and what they need, and have developed the skills required to make learning come alive."

In *What Matters Most*, the commission offers five major recommendations:

1. Get serious about standards, for both students and teachers
2. Reinvent teacher preparation and professional development
3. Fix teacher recruitment and put qualified teachers in every classroom
4. Encourage and reward teacher knowledge and skill
5. Create schools that are organized for student and teacher success

The status of teaching in America is not a new issue, nor is the critical analysis of teacher performance, education, and preparation. When the Soviets launched Sputnik in 1957, American policymakers looked to education and teachers to provide leadership in the space chase. A quarter of a century later, the release of *A Nation at Risk* launched a new bevy of criticisms and initiatives, some of them aimed at teacher education and teacher effectiveness.

While critics through the years have taken aim at teaching effectiveness, development, and preparation, many of the reform initiatives of the past quarter-century have focused on increased academic standards, parent involvement, schoolwide improvement, and other efforts. But the focus on effective teaching for student success is relatively new in educational research. "Schools can never be more effective than the quality of their teachers," write the editors of the *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education*. "Since the 1950s, a number of federal initiatives have sought to make schools more effective while circumventing teacher development by relying on textbooks, curriculum packages, television, school reorganization, parental involvement, testing, and instructional processes that were supposed to be teacher-proof. Although hundreds of millions of dollars were expended in developing such resources and strategies, attempts to improve schools are only now refocusing on the quality of teachers and teaching."

Writing in *Education Week*, John Goodlad noted: "How is it that we neglect our teachers and, therefore, our children and the public purpose of schooling? Three major ways come immediately to mind: the relatively unchanging circumstances of teaching, our persisting images of what teaching in schools requires, and the ill-conceived routes to teaching these circumstances and images sustain."

Yet Goodlad and his colleagues have found in extensive research that future teachers "were innocent victims" of a system that does not meet their needs—nor those of their future students—well. And, he notes, future teachers are willing to make the necessary sacrifices that would enhance their education and improve their effectiveness with students. "Most would have welcomed a less crowded, less hurried program, particularly involving more time in field and practice situations accompanied by guided reflection," he writes. "Few were put off by the suggestion of an additional year to facilitate this—so long as the requirements are made clear at the outset."

Percentage Enrollment for Black and Hispanic Students in Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Schools, for Selected Years

	1970	1976	1986	1993
Black	11.6	12.2	16.1	16.6
Hispanic	3.0	3.9	9.9	12.7

Source: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office for Civil Rights (1978). *Distribution of Students by Racial/Ethnic Composition of Schools* 1970-1976; U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (1986). *State Summaries of Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey*. National Center for Education Statistics (1995). *Common Core of Data*.

In the increasingly diverse classrooms of today's schools, reform efforts must focus on the teacher and her ability to address the individual learning styles and needs of a rich mix of children. "Teaching diverse learners to perform in these more challenging ways," argues researcher Linda Darling-Hammond, "requires changes that cannot be 'teacher-proofed' through new textbooks, curriculum mandates, or tests. As state after state has sought to re-create schools so that they can meet 21st-century demands, it has become apparent that their success depends fundamentally on teachers: What teachers know and can do is the most important influence on what students can learn."

One organization that has focused exclusively on teachers and teacher education is the Holmes Group, a consortium of education deans "organized around the twin goals of the reform of teacher education and the reform of the teaching profession." In 1986, the Holmes Group published *Tomorrow's Teachers*, an outline of the group's goals for the reform of teacher education. It was followed in 1990 by *Tomorrow's*

Wanted: Two million energetic, articulate, intelligent professionals

Schools, a detailed account of the group's vision for "professional development schools." The schools represent new educational institutions that would connect university-based education schools to public elementary and secondary schools.

In 1995, *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* built upon the principles and ideas promoted in the first two reports published by the Holmes Group. America's strategies for educating teachers, the group notes, are slipshod and inconsistent. "Over 1,200 institutions of higher education and a growing number of nonprofit corporations now educate teachers for work in America's schools," the report notes. "Some offer excellent preparation for those who teach. Others provide shoddy preparation that angers and embarrasses those who care deeply about the minds and welfare of America's young."

The Homes Group calls upon its 250 member schools of education to take the lead in reform and to:

- Be accountable to the teaching profession and to the public for the trustworthy performance of their graduates at beginning and advanced levels of practice
- Make research, development, and demonstration of quality learning in real schools and communities a primary mission
- Connect with professionals directly responsible for elementary and secondary education at local, state, regional, and national levels to coalesce around higher standards
- Recognize interdependence and commonality in preparing educators for various roles in schools, roles that call for teamwork and common understanding of learner-centered education in the 21st century
- Provide leadership in making education schools better places for professional study and learning
- Center their work on professional knowledge and skill for educators who serve children and youth
- Contribute to the development of state and local policies that give all youngsters the opportunity to

Staff Development Beliefs

- It is the responsibility of all staff to engage in professional development activities that will enhance their effectiveness
- Staff development is most effective in bringing about change when programs are ongoing and there is ample opportunity for follow-up
- Effective staff development programs recognize principles of adult learning and the professional competence and commitment of all staff
- Staff development programs are most effective when they help staff integrate new learning with previously successful practices
- People acquire and retain new skills and knowledge more effectively through a growth process than through a process that emphasizes correction
- Change is a process; implementation of educational programs takes from two to five years
- Needs identified by various groups and individuals are the basis for designing staff development
- Commitment to implement planned change is built through collaboration and communication
- Teachers possess clinical expertise which, when shared, improves teacher effectiveness
- Investment in developing the district's human resources yields dividends in accomplishing district goals
- An effective staff development program supports personal self-improvement within the context of organizational goal setting
- Effective staff development attends to the human needs of those for whom it is designed
- An effective staff development program builds on the preservice training of teachers as the beginning of a continuum of development

Source: National Staff Development Council, 1989.

learn from highly qualified educators.

In some ways, current teacher recruitment and retention practices perpetuate the inequalities that persist in American education. When faced with shortages of teachers, administrators and policymakers have typically lowered standards to fill positions. "As teacher demand is growing, and as standards for teachers are being raised, the qualifications and abilities of teachers in advantaged communities are becoming ever more impressive," writes Darling-Hammond. "At the same time, however, over 50,000 teachers annually have been entering teaching on emergency or temporary certificates with little or no preparation at all. Most of these underprepared entrants are hired to teach in low-income schools in central cities and poor rural areas."

As a result, urban and rural poor children are more likely to be taught by teachers who are academically unprepared to teach their subject areas and ill-prepared to meet the needs of students. "This poses the risk of heightened inequality in opportunities to learn and in outcomes of schooling—with all of the social dangers that implies—at the very time when all students need to be prepared more effectively for the greater challenges they face," Darling-Hammond notes.

The ranks of minority teachers also must be increased in America's classrooms. While the percentage of African American, Hispanic American, and other minority students has increased in the past quarter century, the percentage of minority teachers has remained steady. For example, in 1993-94, 7.4 percent of the nation's public school teachers were African American and 4.2 percent were Hispanic American. The figure for African American teachers is down from 1971, when they held 8.1 percent of the public school teaching positions.

Percentage Distribution of Public Elementary and Secondary School Teachers by Race/Ethnicity, for Selected Years

	1971	1976	1981	1986	1991
White	88.3	90.8	91.6	89.6	86.8
Black	8.1	8.0	7.8	6.9	8.0
Other	3.6	1.2	0.7	3.4	5.3

Source: National Education Association (1992), *Status of the American Public School Teacher 1990-91*.

"The shortage of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American teachers is becoming increasingly evident in every region of the country; in urban, suburban, and rural school districts; and in public and private schools, colleges, and departments of education," notes the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education in a report, *Recruiting Minority Teachers: A Practical Guide*.

And, reports Amy Stuart Wells in *Equity and Choice*, there are few minorities in the pipeline for education credentials. "Of all students presently enrolled in programs leading to initial certification at the elementary level, 90 percent are White, 4.3 percent are Black, 2 percent are Hispanic, and 1.8 percent are Asian. In contrast," she notes, "93 percent of the nation's largest urban school districts maintain minority student enrollments of more than 70 percent."

There is much more involved in educating, recruiting, and retaining minority teachers than providing role models for minority youth. Minority teachers also provide inroads for majority teachers into the experiences, cultures, and backgrounds of

Continued on Page 31

OFF

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CHINIAK, Alaska— Two orbs of glass glint on Elaine Griffin's coffee table. One is a Japanese fishing float, crudely blown in pocked glass the color of a Seven-Up bottle. The other is an apple of flawless crystal. The objects came from the far ends of America, both in geography and influence. The float, which washed ashore on a wind-swept Alaskan island, was a gift from an Aleut postmistress. The crystal apple was presented to Griffin by Bill Clinton in the White House Rose Garden.

Together, the apple and the float symbolize a career that burst from the shadows into the spotlight in 1995. That was when Griffin was chosen National Teacher of the Year. The honor, bestowed by the Council of Chief State School Officers and Scholastic Inc., plucked the soft-spoken teacher from a tiny school on the outer reaches of Alaska's Kodiak Island and put her on TV screens and stages across America. Dressed in the first business suit she'd ever owned, gold loops shining on ears newly pierced for the camera, Griffin gave interviews to morning news anchors Paula Zahn and Joan Lunden. She chatted with U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley at a reception in Washington, D.C. She spoke to audiences of both new and longtime educators from coast to coast. Everywhere she went, in the custom of the Aleut villagers who were her first students, she told stories about salmonberries and tundra-grass baskets and the wisdom that lives in tradition.

Many listeners took inspiration from her words, says Jon Quam, director of the National Teacher of the Year Program. "Elaine Griffin showed us that in a caring environment, students are able to see themselves and how they relate to the world," he says.

In her travels, Griffin found aspiring educators especially receptive to her stories. "Among people who want to become teachers," she says, "there's an enormous hunger to make strong connections with students."

Lessons of the Tundra

Twenty-two years ago, when Griffin and her husband Ned first touched down in Akhiok (say AW-KEE-AWK) Cove in a 1943 Grumman Goose float plane, the village children waded into the water and circled the aircraft, calling, "Are you going to be our teachers? Are you going to be our teachers?" Griffin had indeed come as a teacher. But she also came as a learner. In this roadless hamlet whose 70 inhabitants lived mainly on fish gathered from the sea and berries taken from the tundra, Griffin found a community afflicted with alcoholism and the problems it generates: suicide, child abuse, and teen pregnancy. The troubles came as "quite a shock," she says, for a first-year teacher who grew up as "just a plain old ordinary kid" in rural New York. Yet in this cluster of dwellings on a treeless expanse of tundra, Griffin found every family eager to support their children's education.

"You could look at it in one light and say, 'There's the worst teaching situation you could possibly have—a village struggling with alcoholism, horrible weather, no trees, leaky modular units with a floor that was falling through, only two teachers to teach every single subject K through 12, and no apparent resources," she says. "And yet it was the perfect teaching situation—small numbers of students in multiage groupings that stayed together long enough for real communication to develop.

When we had a program at the school, not only did every single parent in the village come, but every single person came—100 percent. They were down at the school dressed up in their best clothes saying, 'What can I do to help?'"

As often happens when she talks of teaching, Griffin's emotions overwhelm her and she grows quiet while she swallows hard, fighting tears.

"I can just see all their faces," she says. "They believed that somehow, education was going to open the door so that their children could have a better life than they had had, and they all knew how hard life was." Griffin shared their faith that a good education could heal all wounds and open all doors.

One villager became Griffin's mentor. Vera Inga, an accomplished basketmaker who ran the post office, often wove her lessons into stories, just as she wove beads into tundra grass to form the delicate basket that today encases the glass float she gave to Griffin. A native basket is not merely a few handfuls of woven grass, Inga taught. Rather, it is the tangible evidence of centuries of tradition—a "song made visible." Just as one cannot learn to weave without first learning the songs, the language, the ways of one's ancestors, one cannot teach without first understanding the cultural moorings of one's students.

When a group of Job Corps workers Griffin supervised failed to show up for work one sunny July morning, heading instead to the salmonberry fields to harvest the ripe fruit, Inga softened Griffin's anger by showing her that, like basket weaving, berry picking embodies culture. The fruit was needed for food. But, more than that, "you need to be out on the tundra with your grandma," Griffin says. "That memory of picking berries with your grandma is what supports you through the hard times in your life, and gives you the courage to go on." Inga made Griffin see that by focusing on what she saw as irresponsible behavior—failing to show up for work at 8 o'clock sharp—she had missed the larger meaning in the event.

"I was trying to superimpose a lesson about responsibility that I thought I could teach better than one that the entire village knew how to teach already," Griffin says. "I won't say it was arrogant, because I was doing it from good intentions. You don't learn these things in education courses. They have to be learned on the job."

Responsibility was a "big word" for Griffin as a first-year teacher. She set up appointments to call on parents with her complaints: Suzie isn't doing her homework; Billy isn't getting to school on time.

Kevin's house was her first stop. Kevin's father, a single parent, had laid out smoked salmon, fried bread, and tea on a crocheted tablecloth. "My knees were kind of shaking because it was my first visit as a teacher, and I knew I needed to be firm about the homework issue and paying attention in school," she says. "I was just launching into my litany of complaints about Kevin's irresponsibility when Kevin walked by the window. His dad looked up and said, 'There goes Kevin, rolling a drum of oil up to his grandma's house.' He looked me right in the face and said, 'Isn't that wonderful? He's the most responsible son I have.'"

Griffin's voice fills with emotion as she recalls the episode.

"Somehow, Kevin's dad communicated to me what my responsibility was as a teacher—that I didn't just have the responsibility of making sure Kevin did his homework or paid attention in class. I had the responsibility of understanding that Kevin was an irreplaceable person in this world—that the constellation of people who were related to Kevin were all connected to him in ways that could never be made with any other person."

From Inga and the other villagers, Griffin learned about the strength that flows through families and communities, even those that are in trouble. Education theorists now call this innate power to overcome difficulties "resiliency."

"Vera made me see that people's basic humanity exists throughout and underneath problems," Griffin says.

The teachings of Akhiok were the turf in which Griffin's philosophy began to take hold. "I think the purpose of education is to learn to know yourself and who you are so that you can find your place in the world," she says, more than two decades after calling on Kevin's father. Subject matter and skills form only the framework of education, she says. Teaching a student to do well on the SAT or the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills is easy compared with nurturing the child's full human potential. That happens, she believes, when teachers start the engine and then get out of the way.

"You think, as a teacher, that you've educated people, but you're fooling yourself because they can only educate themselves," she says. "What you're really providing them with is sheltered space—space to reflect, to immerse themselves in ideas, to look at things through new eyes."

Experience and personal tragedy have chipped a few holes in Griffin's faith that education has the power to mend every wound that children bring to school. But she continues to believe that education can and must feed children's souls as well as their minds.

"What good does it do you to be well educated if that education is not nourishing to you—if it's like taking a vitamin pill instead of eating wholesome food?" she wonders aloud.

Schopenhauer Lives

In a three-room schoolhouse just a few steps from the rusty trailer house she shares with Ned and two of their three adopted daughters, Griffin's students are engaged in a discussion on pessimism. An excerpt from 19th-century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer's *The Pessimist's Handbook* provides the intellectual fodder. The talk begins with a quick thumb through Webster's for a definition of pessimism.

Then ninth-grader Andrew offers his own definition: "If a glass is half empty, that's pessimism. If it's half full, it's optimism."

His brother John, a sixth-grader, counters wryly: "It depends on what's in the glass."

The sixth- through 10th-graders wrestle with the writer's words. What does he mean when he says friendships rest on illusion? How do feelings of self-worth heal mental suffering? Why does he say nothing can help a person who knows his own worthlessness?

The jangle of a phone cuts into the talk. Looking worried, Griffin takes an emergency call from the district superintendent in the school's closet-sized office. Her eyes are red when she returns. A student in Bethel on Alaska's west coast shot and killed a principal and another student that morning.

Here in Griffin's classroom, sheltered among evergreens on Kodiak Island's rugged eastern shore, students are quiet as they consider the bloody event that has shattered another Alaska school. After a moment of uncomfortable silence, the eight students turn their discussion to school violence.

Daryl says he once visited a school in New York where "people get shot all the time." Griffin notes that while it would be easy to shrug off Schopenhauer as "a dead German," events such as the Bethel shooting remind us of the universality of his ideas. "What he said is still true, and it will still be true in a thousand years," she says. She brings up Viktor Frankl's classic work *Man's Search for Meaning*, which argues that people who feel they have something more to accomplish in life can endure great suffering and hardship. Andrew ties Frankl's point back to Schopenhauer's discussion of self-worth. Marie (one of the Griffins' daughters) brings up *Den of Lions*, a book by Terry Anderson, the American journalist held hostage in Lebanon in the 1980s. Anderson described a fellow hostage whose deep religious convictions helped him endure captivity with grace. The discussion moves to suicide, which plagues the populations of Alaskan villages.

When the period ends, Griffin assigns a reading by French physiologist Claude Bernard on tomorrow's topic: Do we have the right to experiment on animals? Yesterday's discussion centered on the writings of another German philosopher, Georg Hegel. The question: Is human history linear or cyclical? Aristotle, Euclid, Darwin, Galileo, and Homer are some of the other eminent thinkers (many of them iconoclasts in their day) the students have met in their talks.

Twenty-two years have passed since Elaine and Ned Griffin landed in the chilly waters of Akhiok Cove. After six years in Akhiok, they needed access to orthodontists and other services for their daughters. So they left the roadless village for the community of Chiniak (say CHEE-NEE-AK), a smattering of dwellings, a

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bar, and a restaurant linked by a post office just 40 miles by rutted dirt road from the town of Kodiak. In this wooded outpost of 150 inhabitants, Griffin gets the adolescent children of fishers and loggers to gnaw on topics most students don't taste until college. It is during the daily Socratic discussions that Chiniak students find the space to reflect, which to Griffin is essential to a nourishing education.

"The most important thing about Socratic discussion is that students are not being directed by a teacher," Griffin says. "If the discussion is to advance, the students must advance it themselves." Although the teacher does not lead the students toward a "correct" interpretation, she must be in control of the discussion, providing a "safety net" for students, Griffin explains.

Griffin gives a monthly audio course on Socratic discussion for educators in the southwest region of Alaska. She credits Michael Strong of the Center for Socratic Practice with introducing her to the strategy, which she believes is a potent tool for self-knowledge. Writes Strong in *The Habit of Thought*: "In order to engage all students, and to insure that understanding is internalized and not 'merely academic,' a significant percentage of the conversations is about life itself. By means of weaving conversations about life with conversations which interpret texts, it is possible to engage students of all ability levels and attitudes in intellectual activity."

Griffin once held a Socratic discussion with a group of top students in another community. Afterward, they told her they wished she could be their teacher. "You listened to us," they said. "None of our other teachers have time to listen to us."

[redacted]

Griffin's sixth- through 10th-graders include a 12-year-old math whiz who soon will take the SAT for admission to a Johns Hopkins summer program for gifted children. There is a 15-year-old girl (another of the Griffins' children) who suffered severe starvation on the streets of Calcutta as a small child and now struggles with her studies. Another boy is bright but resents being in school. Still another is skilled in drawing and hopes to land an art scholarship.

Each of the eight students has a story, a strength, a self that can emerge fully if provided with space to stretch and grow, Griffin believes. Elaine and Ned Griffin share responsibility for two multiage classes: nine third- through fifth-graders and eight sixth- through 10th-graders. A third teacher works with the primary children. Most students return to Chiniak School year after year, giving Griffin the chance to bond with each boy and girl. In this milieu (she calls it a "teacher's dream"), miracles can happen. For example, every student turns in his or her homework on time every day.

"I just insist that it be done," she says. "I don't let them down, and they can't let me down."

Eighth-grader Daryl Kalua'u admits that he'd rather not be stuck in school. Still, he expresses appreciation for Griffin's efforts. "She helps me whenever I need help," he says. "She'll explain the material to me one-on-one. She'll take time out of her lunch to help."

Tenth-grader Joe Henderson says: "She really cares about the people around her. You can tell by the way she talks to us and presents herself to us. She's really dedicated to her job. If something isn't really interesting to us, she realizes it and makes it more interesting. Because the school's so small, she knows what everybody's like. She knows the kind of things we prefer and don't prefer."

Classmate Erin Koning echoes Henderson's remarks. "All she wants is the best for us," the 10th-grade girl says. "She'll do whatever it takes. We know her as a friend more than as a teacher. She listens to our side before she draws conclusions. She makes her plans around what we're interested in. Chiniak School lets you really go for what you're interested in. It's a really friendly environment."

The students move smoothly through the day: They work independently; they work in pairs; they work in small groups; they work together as a class. Sometimes Griffin pairs younger or struggling students with older or proficient students. At other times, she matches kids who are working at the same level. She adjusts the

Here's a list of books that recently have influenced Elaine Griffin's teaching:

Csikszentmihalyi, M. 1993. *The Evolving Self*. New York, NY: Harper.

Frankl, V. 1946. *Man's Search for Meaning*. New York, NY: Washington Square Press.

Goleman, D. 1995. *Emotional Intelligence*. New York, NY: Harper.

Gardner, H. 1995. *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*. New York, NY: Harper.

Klonsky, M. 1995. *Small Schools: The Numbers Tell a Story*. Chicago, IL: UIC.

Meier, D. 1995. *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Norris, K. 1993. *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Strong, M. 1997. *The Habit of Thought: From Socratic Seminars to Socratic Practice*. Chapel Hill, NC: New View Publications.

pacing, the grouping, even the content as the days and weeks progress.

"One week, we only get to Step One; the next week, we'll get to Step 20," she notes. "We tweak the schedule every two weeks to make better use of time." No two years are the same, she says, because no two groups of students are the same. She molds curriculum to meet the needs and match the interests of students.

As the school day rolls on, students pass between rooms and activities quietly, working with Elaine on language arts, then with Ned on math or computers, then going back to Elaine for a unit on graphing. The purr of the copy machine blends with the murmur of Griffin's hushed voice as she confers individually with students on their projects. With sixth-grader John Van Atta, for instance, she suggests using mail-order earthworms for a science project. He thumbs through a biological supply catalog. "Ah, here we go: 'Worms, live, page 15,' " John says. "Hey, Elaine. I found a couple of entries on worms."

At lunchtime, Griffin reads aloud to the younger group from the historical novel, *Meet Addy*, about a family of slaves planning an escape, as students chew quietly on apples and baloney sandwiches. They talk about the Underground Railroad over chocolate chip cookies and Jell-O Pudding Snacks.

The Griffins' styles are complementary. Elaine describes Ned's approach as systematic and linear. Hers is more organic and circular. "growing out of the moment," she says.

A former children's librarian, Griffin builds history units around books that students choose from the school's extensive collection. Students design book-based projects that they present to the class (often with parents present) each Friday. Fourth-grader Brady, for example, read a book on Frederick Douglass and another on the Civil War. He then made a diorama of the Elkhorn Tavern, the site of a significant battle. His mom Nellie grew up playing in the cellar of the Elkhorn. She helped Brady with his project using childhood memories as a resource. Third-grader Justine read *Ben and Me* and *Making Books*. She then created her own book of sayings from Ben Franklin's almanac, illustrating the sayings with computer-generated graphics. Kelly videotaped a mock news interview with the Pilgrims as they landed at Plymouth Rock. Kate wrote a play about Columbus' voyage, assigning the roles of King Ferdinand, Queen Isabella, Columbus, and various bit parts to fellow students. Marjeena, the Griffins' daughter from India, read three biographies of Abe Lincoln and studied a guide to making pop-up books. Not only did she make her own pop-up book on Lincoln and the Civil War, she also taught other students to make pop-ups during "centers." That's where each student learns a specific skill such as piano playing, drawing, or desktop publishing from another student or a teacher at one of several learning centers set up around the school.

"We give students the freedom to learn what they want to learn," says Griffin.

When the Griffins teach, they work around the clock. They coordinate after-school activities, such as volleyball and chorus. They oversee intramurals and community basketball on weekends. Sort stacks and stacks of mail. Order books and supplies. Plan curriculum. Seek out sources of money.

The couple avoids burnout by sharing their positions with another couple on alternate semesters. They leave their winter post on Kodiak Island to spend their springs in other exotic corners of the world: teaching at an orphanage in Calcutta. Preserving native plants at a rain forest nursery in Australia. Attending Spanish language school in Mexico.

A Sense of Place

The excitement in the room is electric. Clumped tightly around a Power Mac, students cheer when they link up to a Web site in Moscow, Russia. There, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is tapping out answers, usually in English but sometimes in Czech, to online questions from students around the planet.

With a computer for each student and an Internet connection, Chiniak School can join the world community at the thump of a finger. Fiber-optic connections make these once-isolated students instant world travelers. But in the ether of cyberspace, images are digital. No amount of Web surfing will replace the impact of place on who we are, in Griffin's view. Landscapes bind communities and give shared meaning to experience, she says. The timbered headland of Cape Chiniak meets the Gulf of Alaska in a stunning clash of rock and surf that can coax startling eloquence from the keyboards of children. Sixth-grader John Van Atta, asked to write about his favorite place, pens in part:

If the tide is low enough, I can scan the rocks for shavings of arrowheads and the past of people that once lived here before the time of the trees. As I listen to the waves churning softly, I imagine a 12-year-old boy who lived here centuries ago, sitting on a piece of driftwood like me. The islands are teeming with black-legged kittiwakes, trying to chase an eagle away or feed their young. For him, no pink buoys dot the horizon, but nature is much the same. He scans the mountains, tall and proud. The cliffs, like a face with wildflower jewelry. The bushes, alive with animals in their homes. The beach greens that one of his sisters are gathering for the next meal.

While landscapes can unite communities, they can also divide them. Loaded log trucks gouge huge ruts in the road from Chiniak to Kodiak, hauling the harvest of the native corporation that owns most of Chiniak's timber. The logging "is just killing our souls," says Woody Koning, a house painter and artist whose two daughters have been Griffin's students. But for every parent who objects to the clear-cutting, another makes his or her living from logging. So when Griffin stood before the local planning commission several months ago to make a statement on behalf of Chiniak's children, she condemned no one. She asked only that planners consider the significance of woodlands in the collective consciousness of local girls and boys.

Involvement in place and community, Griffin believes, is fundamental to teaching.

"Every student in Chiniak talks about the trees in his or her writing," Griffin points out. "That's the dominant aspect of their life. If those things give your students emotional roots, you owe it to your students to take that root as deep as it can go and explore it. How can you even teach if you don't know what the emotional roots are? You're helping them to see that the visual images around them are shared communitywide." (See sidebar for more student writing.)

Last winter, a mechanic for a local logging company offered to bring life and sound to the Civil War stories the students had been reading. One misty February afternoon, gun collector Claude Travis loaded black powder into a miniature cannon on the school grounds. His son Brady lit the fuse. The little cannon, which Travis described as an "itty-bitty play toy," let loose a BOOM! that shook the ground. Students jumped and covered their ears. "Imagine," Travis told the students, "100 cannon going off at the same time. Imagine several thousand black-powder rifles giv-

Trees have a strong presence in Chiniak students' writing. Here are some examples:

"On a breezy day, you can smell the saltwater in the air along with the smell of campfires off in the distance. There are trees all around me that are like shelter." Daryl Kalua'u, Grade 8

"In front of us, there are alders and small, scraggly spruce crowded together. There is not much frost, but it is easy to see on the alders and willows, much less so on the spruce." Andrew Van Atta, Grade 9

"He can see many different views of the world. On one side, he sees the beautiful land of Alaska. Deer are roaming the forest floor searching for things to eat, along with eagles soaring high, searching for their next prey. . . On the other side, all that can be seen is the forest being destroyed. The bareness of the once thriving rainforest is an image stuck in his mind for life." Erin Koning, Grade 10

"I love the sound of branches slapping against each other." Marjeena Griffin, Grade 7

"Before logging started here in our beautiful village called Chiniak, the view from the roof was nothing short of breathtaking. Now that nearly all of the trees in that area have been cut down, what used to be solid green is now bare hillsides." Joe Henderson, Grade 10 ing off big puffs of blue smoke."

Every parent is not only welcome but actively encouraged to bring his or her talent, skill, knowledge, and support to Chiniak school. They teach art lessons. They cook hot lunches. They gather cans and donate the money for supplies and books.

"The more remote you are, the more important community becomes as a resource," Griffin notes.

Parents apply terms of great respect and admiration to Griffin:

- "A consensus builder"
- "Incredibly nurturing"
- "Very eloquent"
- "Gifted"
- "Draws people together"
- "Makes people feel special"
- "Spearheads the whole attitude at the school"
- "An absolute genius in involving the parents in the school"

"She and her husband Ned are absolutely the most dedicated, true teachers I've ever met," says Woody Koning, who serves on the advisory board. "She's been a real inspiration to me. She's been more than a teacher to us: She's been like an aunt and a mentor. She's helped me in my personal life.

"Teaching is more than a job and money and a career to them," Koning says. "It's their life."

One of the biggest surprises of Griffin's travels as Teacher of the Year came in Washington, D.C., where she participated in a gathering of Presidential Scholars chosen for academic and artistic excellence. Each of these top-flight students introduced the teacher who'd made the greatest impact on her or his schooling.

"I thought I was going to hear 150 students stand up and say, 'This is my French teacher who made the conjugation of verbs come alive for me so that I was able to learn that dull, dry material in a fascinating way,' or 'This is my biology teacher who really helped me see how you organize experiments, and I won the Westinghouse Science Fair because of her.' Not one student said that. Student after student stood up and said, 'This is Ms. Smith, my French teacher, and I brought her with me, not because she taught me a lot about French, but because she taught me how you should treat other people. She treated every student in her class fairly.' And 'This is Mr. Jones, my chemistry teacher, and I brought him because he taught me that every student in the class has value.'"

The students also talked a lot about teachers who helped them learn to question.

"One student said, 'This is Mr. Austin, and I brought him along because when I went into his class at the beginning of the year, I was full of questions, and when I left the class at the end of the year, I hadn't found out any answers to any of those questions—and I had a whole lot more questions I wanted to know the answers to.' "

Griffin laughs delightedly at the memory. Cradling in her hands the glass fishing float, the gift from her Aleut mentor, she says: "I thought, 'How liberating this is—that students value their teachers for the same things I want to be valued for.' I want to humanize education." ■

Elaine Griffin offers this advice to would-be teachers:

"I think you need to have a love of learning that you've experienced inside yourself so you know what you're aiming for. Then, you need to be able to back away from the feeling that you can mold students. You need to open up the whole realm of the love of learning for them so that they can pick their own road to follow."

MASTER TEA

Northwest teachers recognized for their excellence find new ways to challenge themselves and their students

Stories by MICHAEL TEVLIN

Karen Fulmer, Washington Teacher of the Year, is surrounded by the girls' chorus at Sumner Junior High School. Photo by Tony Kneidek.

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For Karen Fulmer, Washington's 1997 Teacher of the Year, teaching music is a vehicle to transport students to new worlds of self-discovery.

"While teachers may specialize, I don't think they can say about themselves, 'I am a music teacher, I am a science teacher, I am a math teacher,'" says Fulmer, who has taught for 21 years. "You have to think of yourself first as a teacher of students. And I think you have to draw as much as you can from the other subject areas and work on their integration, because this is how our world operates."

Case in point: Fulmer incorporated a schoolwide diversity theme into a solo and ensemble contest. Making music together requires tolerance for other people, Fulmer says. And tolerance starts with each child understanding what makes her or him unique.

So in addition to singing, learning to read music, and preparing for the contest, Fulmer's students at Sumner Junior High School create diversity journals, discuss diversity in class, learn about different musical styles, and study music from diverse cultures. One homework assignment calls for students to monitor an assigned radio station to analyze the song playlist.

All this activity is par for the course for Fulmer and her students.

In addition to teaching 175 students in four sections of chorus and choir, Fulmer serves as K-12 music coordinator for the 7,200-student Sumner School District. She also directed the 325-member All Northwest High School Honor Choir, culminating in a concert for 3,000 parents and music directors at the Music Educators Northwest Conference this spring.

Fulmer prepared 100 students for extracurricular competitions, including working with two of her students who were selected to sing in the National Honor Choir. She also serves as an officer in the American Choral Directors Association.

All this takes energy, which happens to be one of Fulmer's criteria for anyone considering teaching at her level. That, and a love for children.

"You have to be the kind of person who has tenacity, who has the energy and strength to sort out what's important, and the drive to want to be there for kids," Fulmer says.

Being there for her students and watching them succeed keeps Fulmer coming back. "For me, it's recognizing the progress the kids make," she says. "In the middle grades, sometimes it feels like we take two steps forward, then it's a step back.

"But every day I stop and think: I have the power to influence what happens in this classroom. How the kids view themselves. How they view learning. How they view whether what they're doing is meaningful. I try to focus on that every day."

★★★★★★★

Ford Morishita looks at student achievement the way a track coach looks at the high jump: There's always room for raising the bar.

"Too many students today have bought into mediocrity," says Oregon's 1997 Teacher of the Year. "They think that it's OK to just get by with the bare minimum."

So Morishita, who coaches boys' track in addition to teaching biology at Clackamas High School in Milwaukie, sets the mark higher. In a field where "satisfactory" is often equated with "good enough," Morishita has drawn a line. Daily, he asks each of his students to hurdle it. "For me it's an ongoing battle," says the veteran of 18 years in the classroom.

Morishita's strong background in the liberal arts has helped him take a wide view of science education into the classroom.

His general biology students learn to apply the disciplines of scientific inquiry and legal process to real-life problems. They role-play lawyers and judges, grappling with legal and ethical issues such as genetic engineering, life-prolonging medical technology, and the teaching of creation science. Students must research and use precedent-setting case law to support their arguments and rulings.

"I try to make the subject relevant by tying into social responsibility and how that affects us as future citizens," Morishita says. "We're not only learning about science, we're also learning how it affects us in society."

In Morishita's biology labs, students learn to hypothesize, to inquire into how and why things happen, and to experiment. Morishita decries traditional labs that use what he calls a "cookbook" approach to science. Such labs, he notes, follow a rote formula that stifles student inquiry. "'This is what you do,'" Morishita says, mimicking the formulaic approach in these labs, "'and these are the results you get.' It's ridiculous to think we're really accomplishing science."

Instead, Morishita's students learn what he calls the "Three Ps" of science: problem posing, problem solving, and peer persuasion. For example, a student may hypothesize that test taking causes anxiety. To prove her hypothesis, she runs an experiment on several groups of students, then reaches a conclusion based on her findings.

But the student-scientist's work is not complete. "You're not really doing science unless you can persuade your peers that your work is valid," Morishita says. His biology students must present their findings to the class as a final step.

Morishita's emphasis on academic rigor springs from his belief that educators play a vital role in preparing the citizens of the future.

And the future is a concern for Morishita, who has witnessed a decline in respect for education among students. Morishita believes the need for excellent teachers is greater than ever. "The contribution that a teacher can make now is probably unprecedented. We know so much more about the way students learn, how they perform, how we stack up against other countries."

Morishita's background as a coach spills over to his role as a teacher. "I guess it's the coach in me coming out," he says. "Somehow I have this inherent sense that this is something I was meant to do. It's the challenge of how many kids can you get motivated to work at their true potential, striving to do the best they can, never being satisfied with doing a mediocre job."

* * *

When Judy Kuhn was 23 years old and looking for adventure, she headed north to Alaska from her native Washington state.

She landed in Anchorage, but left to work as a bookkeeper for an Alaskan native corporation in Aniak, a village on the Kuskokwim River about 150 miles Northeast of Bethel.

In her early days in Alaska, Kuhn admits that teaching was not what she had in mind. In fact, she says, she got into education completely by chance. But 21 years after going north, Alaska's 1997 Teacher of the Year looks back over her life and wouldn't have it any other way.

Just living in Alaska's bush is an adventure in itself. "I've always wanted to live in a log cabin by a river, and that's the life I have now," Kuhn says.

Kuhn entered teaching through

the back door. In Aniak, word got around that Kuhn enjoyed arts and crafts. Before long, she found herself teaching art once a week at the local school.

Kuhn decided to get her teaching certificate at the University of Alaska at Anchorage. Her first teaching assignment was north of Aniak in the Yukon River town of Holy Cross. Thirteen years ago, Kuhn took her current job teaching kindergarten and first grade in McGrath, a village of 500 farther up the Kuskokwim.

McGrath sports a post office, a Federal Aviation Administration weather station, an Alaska Commercial Co. store, a liquor store, a road house, and a lodge and café. It's a big town by Alaskan bush standards. Kuhn walks to school every day along snow-packed roads. School starts at 9 a.m., except when it's more than 46 degrees below zero. On those days—it was more than 50 below for a week and half in December—students come to school at noon, when it "warms up."

Kuhn uses her art background to create a fun and stimulating classroom that builds on international and other themes. For example, to celebrate the Chinese New Year (she taught English in China for a year), Kuhn hung a giant paper dragon from the rafters. Students learned to write Chinese calligraphy characters. They said hello and goodbye in Chinese. They danced the Chinese ribbon dance and ate Chinese food they'd cooked.

At the start of the year, Kuhn's farm and ranching unit had students roping sawhorse "steers," milking powdered-milk-filled latex gloves on sawhorse "cows," dancing square and Western dances, and watching a real rodeo rider demonstrate roping.

"It's like I'm a kid again," Kuhn says. "I try to coordinate everything I can."

All the fun masks Kuhn's serious intent. She focuses on cooperative learning, self-esteem, and working together in teams. "We're not teaching just core subjects anymore," she notes. "It's drug and alcohol awareness, sexually transmitted diseases, smoking, and making children aware of choices."

When she returns at the end of the day to her cabin, Kuhn smiles to think of her adopted home. "I think you have to be able to put down roots somewhere," Kuhn says. "It's only by being willing to stay and make changes that change can happen."

Kuhn sees school as an integral part of her students' futures. "It's in the classroom," she says, "where the future begins."

* * * * * * *

Jim Francis has had a longstanding love affair with history. As an eight-year-old at Grand Teton National Park, Francis recalls listening intently over the crackle of a campfire to a park ranger's story about the mountain men and fur trappers of the Yellowstone country.

Later, in high school, an inspirational teacher used storytelling to breath life into history for Francis. Finally, in college, the memory of those stories—and of the people who told them—led Francis to choose a teaching career.

Today, the 48-year-old Francis is just as excited about history. Except these days, he's the one telling the stories. "Even before I student taught, I realized I'd been working on the concept of teaching history for a long time," Francis says.

As a history teacher at Idaho Falls High School and Idaho's 1997 Teacher of the Year, Francis uses history as a way to teach skills that will serve students the rest of their lives. "I love history because it's a subject that allows me to set the issue and encourage the students to grapple with it," Francis says.

For example, when Francis was listening to a lecture last summer on the history of the Bosnian conflict, he couldn't help but see ways to incorporate lessons into his classes. "I was getting all kinds of ideas for setting up a village in my classroom made up of students role-playing Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, and the dynamics that village is going to have to deal with," Francis says.

This year, Francis' classes include World Civilizations—an elective course he wrote and developed himself—two U.S. history sections, and an advanced placement U.S. history class. He's also team-teaching an interdisciplinary history-English class that explores the themes of triumph and tragedy.

In the interdisciplinary class, Francis combines two passions that at first may seem contradictory: planning and improvisation. But planning is where creativity can be applied, Francis says. Once the class has been planned, then it's fun to be open to spontaneity in the classroom.

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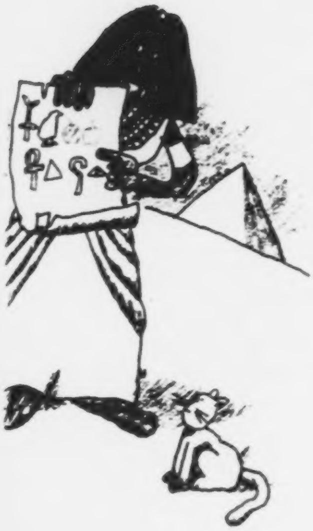


RETOOLING EDUCATION HOLDS PROMISE FOR TEACHERS

BY CATHERINE PAGLIN

Inside, too, the schoolhouse was bright and shining. The walls of new lumber were clean and smelled fresh. Sunshine streamed in from the eastern windows. Across the whole end of the room was a clean, new blackboard. Before it stood the teacher's desk, a boughten desk, smoothly varnished. It gleamed honey-colored in the sunlight, and on its flat top lay a large Webster's Unabridged Dictionary.

—These Happy Golden Years,
Laura Ingalls Wilder

In 1883, when 16-year-old Laura Ingalls taught a three-month school in the Dakota Territory, her instructional tools were the dictionary, ruler, chalk, and blackboard. Her three students brought readers and spellers from home and worked on slates with slate pencils. For Ingalls, these bare essentials were simple and familiar, not something she had to study to earn her teacher's certificate.

Today, new teachers face a staggering array of media and technologies which are changing faster than ever before: desktop computers, networks, and laptops; software of every type—word processing, spreadsheet, database, multimedia, graphics, educational games, and telecommunications; CD-ROM; digital cameras; scanners; camcorders; laser disc players; video and audio cassette recorders; and the Internet in all its permutations including e-mail, the World Wide Web, search engines, FTP sites (Internet sites from which software can be downloaded and uploaded), and newsgroups.

The advancing technologies—and their applications in public school classrooms—can be imposing to students learning to be teachers in the 21st century. "At first it was very intimidating," says Larissa Benner, an elementary education student in Portland State University's Graduate Teacher Education Program. Benner works at a computer in PSU's Metropolitan Instructional Support Laboratory along with 29 other students from her elementary education cohort. Surrounded by coffee cups, water bottles, and notebooks, the students enter information such as student names, parents' names, addresses, and birthdays into a database. The information can be used to sort students by month of birth, print labels for mailings to parents, assemble an address book, and other tasks.

Benner is taking Instruction and Technology, a course required by the state of Oregon for a teacher's license. At PSU, the course includes units on various instructional strategies, selecting and evaluating instructional media, using classroom management software, using multimedia in instruction, and putting together an electronic portfolio.

In this lesson, PSU instructor David Bullock focuses on management applications such as electronic grade books, showing students how they can either create their own—using spreadsheet software—or download examples from the Internet. Grade book software, he explains, can help teachers compute final grades, track missed assignments, generate class statistics, create comment pages, and assemble progress reports.

"We say that a large part of our job is to provide opportunities for students to see how technology can work for them as professionals," says Assistant Professor Emily de la Cruz, who team teaches the class with Bullock. She teaches students about designing lessons and assessments and using various instructional strategies such as cooperative learning, inquiry-based learning, and direct instruction. Bullock focuses on the instructional tools—when to include technology in instruction and how to select it.

Teaching preservice teachers to use classroom management software, as Bullock does, may not at first glance appear to further any lofty educational goals. However, the instructors believe that when students see how technology can be personally useful, this opens the door to an understanding of its more creative uses in instruction. Indeed, as they enter grades into a spreadsheet, one pair of students is chatting about how the software could be used for a classroom project on nutrition.

Students come into PSU's school of education with varying levels of comfort with technology. Some have rarely touched a computer, while others have spent years using technology in previous careers. Before taking the class, Benner felt she didn't like and didn't understand computers. PSU's program helped her to overcome those fears.

"Once I had an e-mail account and started doing assignments on e-mail—learning how to communicate with my other cohort members—I found it less intimidating," she says. "Then I learned how to get lesson plans off the Internet, and I felt more confident. Now, hopefully, I can learn how to make grade books and record data. I think by doing it a step at a time I'm less intimidated. I'm sure there's so much more for me to learn."

The skills and knowledge for using technology are near necessities in today's competitive educational job market. "It's extremely important and it's an integral part of our interviews," says Linda Borquist, executive administrator for human resources with the Beaverton School District. "Teachers must be able to teach and model technology."

Beyond word processing, e-mail skills, and the ability to use basic programs as an instructional tool, the Beaverton district is looking for new teachers who are not afraid of technology, who exhibit a sense of enthusiasm, and who understand the value of technology. The district wants teachers who are creative and open to using the ever-changing technology in new ways.

"It's almost become as important as any other subject area we might be probing for, but it's an integration across all subject areas," says Borquist.

Superintendent Ron Naso says the North Clackamas School District also is weighing computer literacy in its hiring formula. "We would hope that our new teachers would be fairly well-versed in the big three of spreadsheet, database, and word processing—plus understanding the Internet," he says. "Having that kind of background, those kinds of skills, would be a significant plus in being hired."

Ideally, says Naso, he would like to see his district hire people who have made technology a part of their lives. "I have this strong belief that, ultimately, people teach who they are. I can take a course, but if I do not use the Internet at home on a personal basis, the probability that I will bring it to the classroom is limited."

Instructors Bullock and de la Cruz agree that one course in itself is not enough for students to truly absorb how to use technology confidently and appropriately. Students in the graduate teaching program routinely use e-mail to submit assignments and daily journals and to communicate with faculty and other cohort members. They also participate in listservs (discussion groups—by subscription—on the Internet), and they access course information for the Instruction and Technology class from a Web page.

One secondary education cohort with a specific focus on technology has even set up its own Web page with links to students'

personal Web pages and other sites they found useful.

De la Cruz and Bullock encourage their colleagues in the school of education to continue emphasizing the skills and ways of thinking introduced in the Technology and Instruction course. For instance, a student taking a course in math methods can evaluate math software using the criteria learned in the foundation class. "Students need to see professors here using technology and they need placements at sites with reputations for using it," de la Cruz adds.

However, what students find at their student-teaching placements varies as much as their personal experiences with technology. Some find well-equipped schools and teachers who know how to use the technologies; others find poorly equipped schools, or equipment that goes unused or is misused for lack of training or interest.

"We've got computers in the classroom and my teacher doesn't use them at all," says one person who is student teaching at a middle school. "The kids play with it. It's kind of a privilege thing."

"There's a lot of teachers, even now—they don't use it as a tool," adds another student. "They just use it as a game or a reward."

Some student teachers bring badly needed technological knowledge and practices to their schools. Students in the PSU program have helped assemble hardware, been invited to join school technology committees, tutored their mentor teachers on uses of software, demonstrated effective ways of using software in instruction, and been hired to conduct training.

"It's a good example of reciprocity," says de la Cruz. "The student-teacher has come with some knowledge and expertise, as opposed to the cooperating teacher holding all the knowledge to pass on."

Chad Holloway, a secondary education student in the graduate teaching program and candidate for a master of education degree, brings both new ideas and new equipment from PSU to Glencoe High School in Hillsboro, where he works with teachers of U.S. and world history.

"Chad has some wonderful plans for getting kids in contact with students in other countries," says Marilyn Ramone, one of Holloway's cooperating teachers. "He's adding excitement and opening up the world to the kids. That's one of the things that's nice about having student teachers. You're able to brush up on all the new stuff."

Using a laptop computer and a projection panel borrowed from PSU, Holloway has enhanced his lectures and discussions with PowerPoint presentations. Tenth-graders in Ramone's world history class will soon begin work on an assignment he designed with input from his PSU cohort members. After writing a traditional report, the students, working in groups of four, will construct a Web page based on the report. Each group will have a technical coordinator, text editor, visual editor, and link coordinator. Students will be graded on their level of group participation; the aesthetics and user-friendliness of their page design; and how relevant their required 500 words of text, five graphics, and three external links are to the subject matter.

Just as the preservice teachers at PSU learn to do in the Technology and Instruction class, the 10th-graders must critically evaluate the linked Web sites using examples and criteria Holloway has discussed with them. "Hopefully, they will realize there are good resources to be found, and also realize there is a lot of garbage out there," he says.

Holloway hopes to get approval at Glencoe to put the students' Web pages on the Internet. "This is a way they can be part of a larger learning community," he says. ■

CONSTRUCTING LIFELONG LEARNERS ONE TEACHER AT A TIME

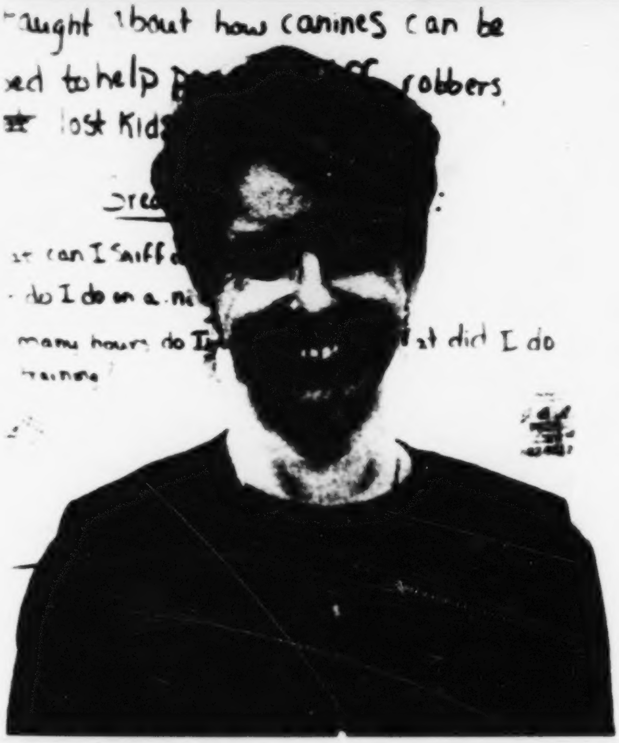
Story by Melissa [illegible] · Photos by [illegible] Kucidek

When Lisia Farley's fourth- and fifth-grade students tackled American colonial history they had dozens of free-wheeling questions for their energetic teacher, including: What kind of jobs did colonists have? What did they do for entertainment? What about the Indians?

Good questions, said Farley, scribing them rapid-fire onto a flip chart. Why don't you tell me the answers? For the next several weeks, youngsters pored over materials Farley provided, looked up information in the library, and even pursued the answers outside the requirements of class and homework. Having defined their field of inquiry, they eagerly sought to till it. In the most natural way, they embodied what it means to be a learner.

"We all start out as natural learners, then we get to school and we're turned into students," says Farley, who teaches at Beckman Primary School in Wilsonville, Oregon.

Recapturing a youngster's zeal for learning—the kind of eagerness for knowledge that lasts a lifetime—starts when teachers themselves are excited about learning. But how do you instill excitement and teach the skills needed to create that enthusiasm in others? Lewis & Clark College, a small, private school in Portland, Oregon, with a reputation for producing exemplary teachers like Lisia Farley, seems to have found a way. The college's Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) program divides into two major strands: one for currently teaching professionals and one for preservice teachers.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Lisia Farley: Creating lifelong learners

Three keys are uniformly cited as critical to Lewis & Clark's M.A.T. program. They are:

- Cohort groupings in which students and faculty focus on becoming a learning community
- A yearlong internship in one classroom with an exemplary teacher as mentor (currently teaching professionals are videotaped or critiqued by several master teachers)
- In-depth coursework in constructivist learning that begins by teaching interns how to be constructivist learners themselves

The Cohort

> *"The cohort experience is one of the most important things about the program. I love it. It builds a support group that gave me confidence to speak in the group sessions. We can say things in a very safe community. And this is precisely what we'll develop in our own classrooms—a learning community where everyone can participate."*
>
> —*Linda Mohr*

The 100 or so interns in the preservice strand are divided into five groups, or cohorts. Each cohort has its own focus. Interns interested in teaching elementary grades can choose a cohort focused on language and literacy or one focused on teaching real-world problem solving through math, science, and technology.

At the secondary level, two similar cohort programs prepare teachers of social studies, language arts, science, math, art, and foreign languages, with interns from a variety of subject areas in both cohorts. Perhaps the most unusual cohort, developed just two years ago, focuses on teaching integrated curriculum to middle schoolers.

The cohort program was designed to prepare new teachers to be agents of continuing.

research-based change in their future jobs. The cohort does this by modeling for interns how to tap into new ideas and discuss them in a collegial way.

Cohort members take all required courses together and meet weekly to share and discuss teaching issues—classroom management techniques, developing appropriate real-world problem-solving curricula, and gender concerns, to name a few. Initially, the weekly sessions are led by a professor designated as cohort leader, but eventually the cohort members are assigned as rotating leaders responsible for fostering a discussion on a topic of interest that they bring to the group.

"We're trying to help them develop an idea of how to be a faculty for each other through the cohort structure," explains Dr. Andra Makler, Associate Professor and Coordinator of Teacher Education Programs. "We're modeling how to have a good conversation about learning, how to draw on other people as resources, ways you can learn to let your colleagues know you have a problem or a question that you need help solving, and how to be friendly critics. We hope that over time they are able to do that in the cohort and to then carry that practice out into the schools."

Linda Mohr, an intern in the elementary cohort focused on math and science, didn't have a problem talking in front of students during her eight years of teaching. But when she moved to Oregon and decided to earn her license through the Lewis & Clark program, she found she was uncomfortable with the idea of speaking before her peers. After several weeks in the cohort group, she found the confidence to express herself before her peers—and found that confidence carried over to other peer-group situations. She looks forward to employing the technique in her own classroom.

"Elementary students, especially, need to feel the classroom is a safe place to participate," says Mohr. "It's the only way to get every child truly involved in learning."

Teachers at every level might agree—especially middle school teachers. Many middle schools are a variation on the junior high school or high school model. Students shuffle from class to class, getting instruction in the teacher's subject specialty—math, science, English. At some buildings, sixth-graders are still in a self-contained classroom. In progressive schools, some curriculum might be integrated in a humanities block.

Lewis & Clark hopes to spread through its graduates the awareness about current best practices in middle school teaching: integrated team planning, integrated (not interdisciplinary) curricula, and support for the whole of a student's concerns, rather than viewing an adolescent as, say, merely a fifth-period math student.

"The cohort model puts the intern at the center of our efforts as a faculty," says Dr. Celeste Brody, Associate Professor and coordinator of the middle school cohort. "And that's what we want our graduates to do in their own classrooms—put each student at the center of their efforts."

A Yearlong Focus

"I wouldn't give up the consistency of the whole-year experience for the advantages of experiencing other teaching styles—which I have the opportunity to see, anyway."

—Michelle Pigeon

Lewis & Clark interns experience a yearlong student teaching assignment. Mentor teachers are paired with interns after the cohort leader consults individually with the school principal, mentor teacher, and intern.

Beginning with planning sessions before the school year starts, interns work closely with their mentor teachers. From the first of the school year through Thanksgiving, interns spend two days a week in the classroom with their mentor. From then until mid-January, interns are in the classroom full time, and from mid-January through spring break they return to two days a week in the classroom. After spring break, the interns take the teaching reins full time.

Interns choose whether to be placed in a suburban or urban setting. However, each intern is paired with another intern in a dissimilar school. Once a month they visit in each other's school to experience the diversity of other schools and students, and to observe other teaching styles. Interns are often encouraged by their mentors to visit in other classrooms in the school to gain a breadth of experience.

Interns say the benefits of a yearlong placement—of watching one group of students progress through an entire learning and curriculum sequence, of becoming part of the school culture and developing relationships with students—are invaluable.

The Coursework

"The professors demand that we be thinkers, not just practitioners. Most of us have had some life experience, so the class dialogue is very rich. You develop your own teaching philosophy through journal writing, reflection, discussion, your own experience, and the new ideas you're exposed to. So the classes provide us with these tools, but these tools have to be refined by our own experience."

—Margaret Wattman-Turner

Courses at Lewis & Clark have several key components: they teach and use a "constructivist" approach, they are steeped in history and philosophy, and they emphasize the need to stay current. All the coursework is oriented toward the intern's future classroom. Classes cover a wide range of subjects, including:

- Developing a critical perspective on education—understanding why schools have developed to their current form and the kinds of experiences different groups have had in public schools

- Educational psychology—covering what is known about memory, knowledge, and language
- Effective student learning—learning to assess when a student knows a topic
- Human development at the appropriate level—including how to talk with parents of children at different ages
- Current technology
- Advanced material in the intern's subject area or areas—elementary teachers teach many subjects

"Many other teacher education programs are simply courses in how to teach, how to organize a curriculum," says Makler. "Teachers can become very good at delivering a particular body of knowledge to students, and people have the feeling that as long as kids are learning and meeting the standards of the district that that's enough. I don't agree. No field is static—to be really informed about your field, you need to develop an internal sense of responsibility toward keeping abreast of change."

Lewis & Clark does this by focusing on a constructivist approach: interns—and in time their own students—construct their own inquiry of a topic. There's very little lecture, and interns aren't given answers—they get help answering questions.

"People don't 'receive' knowledge," says Dr. Jim Wallace. "They construct it. They explore their environment—with guidance—and gradually come to know the current best understanding." Wallace teaches "Social, Historical and Ethical Perspectives on Education," a course that critically analyzes the role of education as a central institution in America—including the effects of diversity on the schools of today.

Lisia Farley encourages a student in her fourth- and fifth-grade class.

In Wallace's class, rather than a lecture on, say, equality, students might lead a discussion about discrimination they have observed or experienced, write case studies on discrimination they are familiar with, read about discrimination, and present their case studies to the class for further discussion. Wallace has interns note their responses to class sessions, readings, and other activities in a written "learning log," which is turned in weekly.

The approach—outlining a field of inquiry, then thinking, discussing, reading, and writing about it to form answers, or beliefs—is crucial to developing individuals who are lifelong learners. And it works with any age, especially when the subject has relevance for the learner.

Toward that end, interns also learn to develop an engaging curriculum for a specific group of youngsters. Rather than presenting a unit on the environment, for instance, interns learn to discuss the topic with students to assess their level of understanding and where their interests lie. They would then pull together resources to explore those interests while providing information relevant to the topic.

"We don't teach interns to 'cover a topic,'" explains Dr. Nancy Nagel, a professor and cohort leader. "We want them to uncover a topic."

For one class of fifth-graders interested in how salmon and humans can coexist, the constructivist approach meant researching and writing a newsletter that the young students sent to environmentalists, government agencies, and public officials. When a class of kindergartners observed crows eating leftovers on the playground, they wondered what happened to such scavengers during the summer. A study of urban wildlife resulted.

Real-world problems and observations such as these—issues of interest to the students that have no obvious solution—connect with young learners, just as our own real-world problems engage us in the exploration of a subject.

"I decided to become a teacher," says intern Michelle Pigeon, "because I love to explore ideas and questions and share ideas and hear ideas and facilitate discussions—that's exactly the approach we're learning here."

Lewis & Clark's program is demanding, but it is designed to be that way. "The experience is very intense, and we attract students to whom this is appealing," notes Makler.

"They can be a feisty group to work with—they challenge us. We're always asking them to give us the reasons for why they do what they do, and they do that to us. But as a faculty we welcome that. I think for each of us, the bottom line is, 'Would I want my kid in your class all year?' We have to be able to say, 'Absolutely.'"

" Teachers teach as they were taught."

—John Goodlad

I am a faculty mentor at the University of Montana.

I began mentoring my peers in the School of Education this academic year as a way to assist them in integrating the uses of technology into their curricula. This is important work and highly regarded by my dean and my department chair, who have agreed that I should devote 10 to 20 hours a week to the project.

As we prepare students to teach in the 21st century, we need to ensure that they are equipped with the tools to meet the needs of children in the next millennium. Many of these tools will be technology tools. Therefore, it is essential that preservice teachers learn to teach with technology, and that they see their professors model the uses of technology. This article explores one approach to infusing technology into the preservice teacher-education curriculum: the assigning of mentors to education faculty members. Mentoring projects at three universities will be described and recommendations will be given for similar projects.

Dr. Don Robson, Dean of the School of Education at the University of Montana, equates the use of technology in education with the advent of the printing press. He believes it is central to the process of accessing, organizing, analyzing, and imparting information—his definition of teaching.

"I see technology tools replacing textbooks and freeing teachers to access a wider variety of materials," Robson says. "The wise and deliberate use of technology also will enable teachers to become facilitators of learning instead of dispensers of knowledge."

Because Robson sees technology as an essential tool in the classroom, he wants his faculty to model the use of technology in their classrooms. To accomplish this goal and to overcome some of the barriers to the use of educational technology, he has taken an aggressive approach to this subject. Robson worked with the technology committee to ensure that all faculty members had a current model computer on their desks. The School of Education has spent more than $100,000 on hardware and software during the last several years. This year, Robson also committed human resources to the effort. That's where I come in. Robson released me from one class per semester, so that I would have time to mentor my peers. In addition, he hired a student assistant to provide technical support 20 hours a week.

IN ADDITION TO HELPING FACULTY in the Elementary Methods Block learn to use and integrate technology into their courses, I also work with faculty from several different disciplines individually on a regular basis. Some faculty I assist on an as-needed basis.

My "regular" protégées set goals at the beginning of the school year. All of them wanted to learn to use the Internet more effectively, both for information and interpersonal purposes. Most of them wanted to learn to use PowerPoint. During the spring 1997 semester, we have focused on HyperStudio. We always set another meeting time at the end of each session. In between sessions, faculty can call me and I help them with their current challenges. In addition to individual mentoring sessions, I have team taught with my protégées or been a guest lecturer in their classes.

The mentoring approach has helped faculty see the benefits of technology, both as a productivity tool and as an instructional one. Dr. Marian McKenna, an Associate Professor of Literacy Studies, is one of my protégées. She recently told me that the mentoring approach has made technology more accessible for her. "Having a mentor has helped me overcome fears of technology," she says. "I'm not just sitting by myself with computer hardware and software. I'm learning from another person, which is important to me. This has helped me become more comfortable with technology and to view it as a useful tool."

This protégé teaches a course to students in Helena, 100 miles away, uses PowerPoint to guide her class discussions, and e-mail to correspond with her students both individually and as a group.

Her students have benefited too. The use of e-mail has made her much more accessible to them, and she uses PowerPoint to help prepare clear, well organized presentations. Most importantly, she notes, students now see her taking risks and learning new material. "I'm in the posture of being a learner," she says, "which is very healthy and provides a bond with my students beyond the rhetoric."

Prior to coming to the University of Montana, I had been involved in a faculty mentoring project at a university in Florida. That experience helped me see the benefits that could be derived from assigning mentors to faculty members.

In Florida, we developed the faculty mentoring project to assist the director of faculty technology development who was very busy mentoring faculty. The first year he was at the university, he worked with eight faculty members. The next year he worked with 40. He mentored the faculty individually and team taught some of their classes with them.

Because faculty members were hungry to learn more about technology, we decided to use students in the Masters in Educational Technology program to mentor faculty members. The graduate students were enrolled in Educational Theory: Theory into Practice, a practicum course in which students facilitate the use of instructional media and information technologies. The graduate students enrolled in the course were paired with faculty who were interested in learning to use technology and integrating it into their classroom instruction.

THE GRADUATE STUDENTS AND I met one night a week to discuss educational technology topics, change theories, and peer-coaching methods. As part of the course, students met with their faculty protégées at least two hours a week. The goal was for the mentors to teach faculty how to use technology, to feel comfortable with it, and to infuse technology into the preservice teacher curriculum.

During the semester, most faculty protégées wanted to learn to use the statewide telecommunications network and a hypermedia program, HyperStudio. Half of the faculty participants were interested in presentation software.

At the end of the semester, the faculty agreed that if they had not had a mentor, they would not have accomplished what they did during the semester. Two of the faculty protégées reported that their regularly scheduled meetings with their mentors were motivating—"similar to going to Weight Watchers or walking with a neighbor," as one faculty member said. In addition to providing motivation and training, the mentors also provided technical and moral support.

The mentoring program at the university in Florida had been based on a similar program at Iowa State University. There, a graduate course entitled Technology in Teacher Education was offered for doctoral candidates in Curriculum and Instruction.

The basic purpose of the course was to review the literature on the use of technology in teacher education and to provide professional practical experiences for the students. For the field component of the course, each of the 11 graduate students was assigned to help one or two faculty members integrate technology into their courses (Thompson & Schmidt, 1994). Faculty from a variety of disciplines volunteered to work with the graduate students.

Each mentoring team worked in a collaborative manner, with faculty members indicating areas where they would like to use technology in teaching and students responding to these possibilities. In most cases, the pairing became a true collaboration; with the graduate student learning about the faculty member's course and curriculum and the faculty member learning more about technology applications and integration (Thompson and Schmidt, 1994). In all cases, graduate students were present to assist faculty members' first efforts to use technology in classrooms. Later in the semester, faculty members used technology without the graduate students' assistance.

Mentoring is an excellent way to overcome the barriers to uses of educational technology in the classroom and to infuse technology into preservice teacher education. It provides faculty an opportunity to learn to use technology tools in a safe environment. The mentor can make faculty members aware of the appropriate technology tools for their teaching learning situation. Finally, the mentor can provide both technical and moral support as the faculty learn to use this tool which will be an integral part of the classroom in the 21st century.

If you are planning to implement a mentoring program at your school, consider these recommendations.

1. Make sure that faculty members and mentors are committed to their goals. The schedules of the people involved are a major consideration; if they do not mesh, the mentoring pairs will have a difficult time meeting to work toward their goals.
2. Ensure compatibility and availability of equipment for the mentoring pair. The school might consider loaning laptop computers loaded with appropriate software to protégées and mentors for the duration of the project.
3. Provide incentives for the faculty to participate. The incentive might be equipment or it might be release time.
4. Require each mentoring pair to develop goals and objectives. It will help them remain on task. It also provides accountability.
5. Consider using undergraduate students as well as graduate students as mentors.
6. Be flexible. There is more than one model for success in a mentoring project.

—Sally Brewer

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Principal: Are you using worksheets today?

Teacher: Yes, but they're not too hot. The instructions aren't too clear, so I end up re-explaining everything to the students. I'm even a little confused about it myself sometimes; I'm not always sure what answer is being asked for. And you know worksheets. They're a little on the dry side, boring—with a capital "B." And then on a few questions, I tell the students to omit them, because we haven't covered the material—it's over things I don't think we need to cover.

Principal: Then why do you use those worksheets?

Teacher: Well, they came with the text . . .

I admit it. I fell asleep while evaluating a history teacher. Here I am, a principal, and someone who prides himself on being a professional's professional, and yet I am confessing that I fell asleep in the back of a bright blue-and-white classroom brimming with 32 students. Why did this happen? I lost in the battle of boredom. As Teaching for Excellence explains it: "Our senses tire of the same stimulation if it is rerun over and over in the same manner. Even the most avid football fanatic would soon grow tired of watching the Super Bowl if it were played day after day."

Let me reassure you: nothing close to a Super Bowl was going on that autumn morning in Mr. Lester's room. What was happening was that Mr. Lester read aloud a paragraph from his worn out, two-ton history book; paraphrased what he had just read; and then dove into the next paragraph. No emotion came forth, no gestures, no movement. The students were breathing, but that was about all I observed in them. And even now, two years later, I recall how excited I became in that classroom when an office aide walked in to deliver a message. I silently gave thanks to her for breaking the monotony. It was after Mr. Lester resumed his reading and summarizing that I nodded off. That afternoon, he and I visited in my office.

Is your classroom boring or interesting? In 1993, *Better Teaching* reported that students seem to distinguish interesting classes from boring ones on the basis of the process rather than the contents of teaching. I have been a secondary school administrator for 10 years, and during that time have witnessed terrified novices, collect-the-paycheck veterans, and master teachers in the classrooms. From my vantage point, either during official evaluations or casual observations, I have at times applauded or winced, rejoiced or struggled to sit still for 45 minutes.

After any of the negative experiences, visits in my office always follow in an attempt to convince the teacher to use a student-centered, teacher-facilitated approach. I remind the teacher this does not mean turning the classroom over to students, then sitting in a corner of the room cleaning out a stuffed filing cabinet.

What I want my teachers to do is turn over to the students a great deal of the thinking—the figuring out. The discovery method comes into play, as do the inquiry model and cooperative learning, and most of the time, much peer interaction. If the students are the ballplayers, then the teacher is everyone else at the game: the supportive parent, the rooting cheerleader, the helpful coach, and the decisive umpire. I am anything but alarmed if I walk into a room and see students moving from activity to activity, sitting on the floor in groups, writing on the board, standing at the podium, coloring, cutting and pasting, rapping, and so forth.

SIX SYMPTOMS OF A BORING TEACHER ARE (1) maintaining a monotone voice and using infrequent eye contact; (2) day-in, day-out lecturing using notes on the board as the sole visual aid; (3) reading the text and paraphrasing what was read; (4) passing out worksheets on a daily basis; (5) regularly instructing students to read the chapter and answer the questions at the end of it; and (6) standing behind the podium, never moving, and expecting students to be seated, never moving. Five symptoms of bored students are (1) watching the clock; (2) restlessness; (3) slouching or sleeping; (4) plodding through work with dull awareness; and (5) not paying attention/misbehavior.

It is simple to become frustrated and even angry with students who do not pay attention. Each of us needs variety, and even though sufficient repetition is needed to infuse new learning, too much repetition can lead to boredom and lowered performance. I tell teachers to be innovative—to bring their lessons to life. To invigorate their classroom—to actually get that lesson across—teachers must keep in mind that it is their delivery method, not the content, that arouses intellectual delight in students. Regardless of the course name, poor methods and manners by the teacher are a sure way to kill curiosity in the subject.

Author and educator Merrill Harmin suggests activities that, quite simply put, inspire involvement. High-involvement lessons are exactly what the name implies and can be achieved by using four basic strategies:

1. Action flow lesson plan
2. Quick pace
3. Teaching in layers, not lumps
4. Limited variety

Face it: Pacing is important. Slowing the pace until every student has mastered every bit of material in a given day drags the lesson and the flow of it, and the students realize it. Don't worry that the students are missing out on grasping new ideas; there can be multiple opportunities to master the material. Restless students much prefer the quick pace. Return to that topic again and again, but from a new angle. Consider cooperative learning to keep that brisk pace going, to energize your charges, and to lay responsibility for learning on the students.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING MAY SEEM FADDISH to some, but ask any businessperson what they seek from new employees. Time and again, those in business are reminding the schools that bosses can teach employees new skills, new ins-and-outs of the trade, but they do not have the time to teach employees how to interact. They have repeatedly asked the schools to emphasize teamwork, appropriate socialization skills, and even peer mediation. Research shows that each of the outcomes of cooperative efforts—achievement, quality of relationships, and psychological health—influences the others. The outcomes of cooperative efforts are truly a package treasured by employers.

I like teachers employing what Thomas Armstrong (1994) termed "MI resources." In his book, *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*, Armstrong notes that the theory of multiple intelligences is an especially good model for looking at teaching strengths and weaknesses. While teachers need not be a master in all seven intelligences—linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodilykinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal—they should know how to tap resources in all seven. From journal writing, Socratic questioning, and sketching, to chants, and hands-on thinking, use of multiple intelligences opens the door to a wide variety of strategies that can be implemented easily in the classroom.

WHEREAS THE DEBATE will never end as to whether teaching is an art, a science, or a combination of both, there is no debate that there are definite wrong turns in the classroom. Taking the students on the road to boredom is a definite wrong.

So in addition to encouraging teacher autonomy in the classroom, I empower teachers to use innovation. They need to try new teaching techniques, new materials, new programs. They must not fear a principal's criticism for risk taking. They must realize that when something goes wrong (it will), the trashed lesson plan will be regarded as a learning experience, not chalked up as a teacher blunder.

In *Empowering Teachers: What Successful Principals Do*, Joseph Blase and Jo Roberts Blase noted that data indicate that creating a nonthreatening environment free from fear, criticism, and reprisals for failure is especially important.

Adding spice to the classroom conjures up many possibilities. Individual teachers must decide what is appropriate, taking into account their own personalities. However, one thing I dismiss with a wave of the hand are the teachers who cry out that they are not able to be creative. There are just too many available sources: colleagues, workshops, seminars, school instructional leaders, and reference materials.

OVER THE YEARS I have kept a log of the instructional strategies that I have observed and have lumped them into a notebook for teacher perusal. However, when I close the door to my office to chat with the boring Mr. Lesters that I run into, before I slide the strategies book across my desk toward them, I am inclined to suggest five immediate changes:

1. Stay away from the podium. Walk around the room; reach out and touch someone. Be among the students. Stay with them, not barricaded away from them.
2. Use emotion. Use gestures, dramatic sweeps of the hand. Show your enthusiasm. If you are not an avid fan of your class, why expect anyone else to be? Make the lesson take on a life of its own, and you will feel learning taking place.
3. Get students out from under the desk. Have them work at different stations around the room or have them work on the floor, but do not permit them to take up pseudo-hibernation in a set seat every day.
4. Throw the textbook away. I mean that much more figuratively than otherwise. Yes, you may use the text, but sparingly. Try to think of it as a resource, as yet another supplemental tool. Build your course around you and the students, making them the stars and you a minor role character.
5. Go with the flow. If the lesson is flowing, if there is much dialogue among the students, continue with the lesson. Stop peeking at your wristwatch, worrying that you must move on to another area. On the other hand, if the dialogue has ended, if the well has run dry, cut off that particular lesson and jump into something else—it's time. But do not limit yourself to 15 minutes on a topic in an attempt to follow a lesson plan time schedule that you concocted two weeks ago.

What happened to Mr. Lester? Did he become a sparkling artist in the classroom? Were students clamoring for more and more of his off-the-wall instructional strategies that piqued their interests, stimulated their senses, and aroused their curiosity? What did happen was this: Mr. Lester was whisked away the following year by a nearby school district to fill the position of assistant principal. Whether or not he is just as boring in his new role escapes me.

As to the other Mr. Lesters, most have improved. Some realize their own inadequacies; others have had them pointed out to them. Most of the boring teachers I have dealt with resolve to rewrite lesson plans during their time off in the summer after stopping in at several workshops.

By the start of school in the fall, they are loaded with new resources, materials, game plans, and are usually determined that the upcoming semesters will prove to be the turn around time in their careers. But during the previous year—when they are still not exciting their students, when it seems that everyone is nodding off except the designated note taker—they still make an effort to wander around the room, to release the textbook from their hands at least as long as a baby can go without a pacifier. They might even learn that students can sleep soundly at night without having filled in seven worksheets during the day.

Let's move toward a fully inspirational classroom. Make it your goal to grab every single student's attention. And while you're at it, make sure to grab the attention of that principal in the back of the room. There might not be an office aide lurking in the background to rescue him.

—***John White* and**
Carolyn White

John White is the Principal at Knappa High School in Columbia School District (Oregon). Caroline White is the Media Specialist at Knappa High School and a doctoral candidate in curriculum and instruction.

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Wanted

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increasingly diverse children in schools across the country. "A society that reflects the full participation of all its citizens will be difficult to accomplish if only one in 20 teachers is a member of a minority group," write the authors of *New Strategies for Producing Minority Teachers*. "At this rate, the average child will have only two minority teachers—out of about 40—during his or her K-12 school years."

American schools have changed dramatically in the last quarter-century, as have the neighborhoods and communities that support education. To reach students on individual levels, to consider their diverse backgrounds, and to address their unique learning styles will require teachers of significant intelligence, empathy, and understanding. In policy terms, notes Darling-Hammond, it's time to build the teaching corps from the bottom up rather than the top down.

"Reforms of teaching," she says, "pose an alternate paradigm. They emphasize bottom-up strategies that build knowledge and capacity within the ranks of teachers and schools, betting on people rather than on bureaucratic systems as the source of improved productivity. They seek forms of accountability that will focus attention on 'doing the right things' rather than 'doing things right.' As such, they demand changes in much existing educational policy, in current school regulations, and in management structures."

Staff development and schools of education programs cannot be cast in a mold and assumed to satisfy all the needs of all the teachers everywhere. The assistance that teachers and students receive should correspond to the communities in which they work, the students they teach, and the resources available to them. What works in central Seattle may not work in suburban Boise or rural McGrath, Alaska. In rural areas, note Mary Queitzsch and Karen Hahn in *Great Expectations: Preparing Rural Teachers for Educational Reform*, teachers and the communities in which they work must form links to universities to pave the way for reform efforts. "Great expectations of rural teachers implies that they are in a lifelong learning mode—on a quest for more knowledge," the authors write. "Great expectations also implies the need for collaboration among community, universities, and teachers to actively engage in educational reform."

To reform the ways of teaching and teacher preparation is a complex task that involves fundamental changes in ways of thinking about, engaging with, and guiding young people in their learning. It is, for many educators and reformers, at the heart of improving schools and preparing students for the challenges and opportunities that await them.

"There is a serious crisis in education," writes bell hooks in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. "Students often do not want to learn and teachers do not want to teach. More than ever before in the recent history of this nation, educators are compelled to confront the biases that have shaped teaching practices in our society and to create new ways of knowing, different strategies for the sharing of knowledge. We cannot address this crisis if progressive critical thinkers and social critics act as though teaching is not a subject worthy of our regard."

RESOURCE NOTES: For fuller discussions of these issues see: Places Where Teachers are Taught *edited by John Goodlad, Roger Soder, and Kenneth Sirotnik;* Teachers for Our Nation's Schools *by John Goodlad;* Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom *by bell hooks;* Tomorrow's Schools of Education *and other publications by the Holmes Group;* What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future; *and* Great Expectations: Preparing Rural Teachers for Educational Reform, *published by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.* ■

TEACHERS

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"We do a lot of role playing where the students act out anything from being Henry Ford to being attorneys at the Scopes Monkey Trial," Francis says. "What they will come up with in their creative presentations, sometimes your mouth will just drop open."

Francis gets excited, not only about the history his students are learning, but the skills they're developing along the way. "Schools should teach skills that will open doors for students," he says. "Not just job skills. But the skill to think logically and defend an idea, the skill to analyze somebody's else's idea, the skill to write, the skill to make comparisons, to draw analogies. Particularly in history and English, we're not just training students for jobs, we're training students to be active members of a democratic society."

For Francis, the joy of teaching history goes back to that eight-year-old sitting on the edge of a log around the campfire. "I had a student who once said to me, 'I learned a lot in this class, even though I didn't want to.' And that says a whole lot about what I'm trying to do. That it could be so exciting that, even though you didn't want to do any work, you still wanted to be there, and you still learned a lot."

* * *

Kimberley Girard can see it coming. It's that "can-we-change-the-subject" look she gets from people when she tells them she teaches mathematics. "I can almost see some of these people back up," says Girard, Montana's 1997 Teacher of the Year.

Call it math anxiety. Math illiteracy. One expert even coined the term "innumeracy," says Girard, a veteran of 17 years in the classroom. Whatever it's called, this phobia of things numerical is a call to arms for math teachers like Girard. "One of my goals in life is to help students overcome math anxiety," she says.

Girard's antidote includes large doses of problem solving, active student participation, learning by doing, and appealing to a variety of learning styles.

For example, students in Girard's junior and senior classes at Glasgow High School read articles about mathematics. They write essays. They collect and analyze cartoons that use math principles. They explain their answers to problems. And they demonstrate what they've learned in much different ways than their parents ever did.

"In the arts, students can play a solo, or they sing a song, or create a piece of pottery," Girard says. "In math, all we've had are tests."

The trouble with many tests, Girard says, is they tell a teacher what a student doesn't know, rather than showing what a student can do. So Girard's students do projects. For example, one project called for students to predict the changing hours of daylight over the year. Students collected data on certain days, then developed a formula that could be applied to predict the amount of daylight on any given day.

To teach the concept of calculating probabilities, Girard's students designed their own carnival games. As a reward at the end of the unit, they spent the final class playing the games.

Another class studied functions using a fictional ostrich farm. Students calculated egg production, expenses, and profit-and-loss statements. "Rather than doing only what is called drill and kill, students need to learn in the context of a problem that has to be solved," Girard says.

Students retain more when they connect what they've learned with real-life examples. "When asking the kids to recall functions, I'll remind them of the ostriches," Girard says.

Girard also sees value in the emerging tools available to math students. If music students can use their clarinets and saxophones to make music, Girard reasons that math students can use their calculators to do mathematics. "We use calculators every day," she says. "It's made more math accessible to a greater range of students."

Prominently displayed above Girard's desk is a poster with the statement, "The ultimate goal of teaching is to enable those taught to get along without the teacher." For Girard, the poster sums up her teaching philosophy.

"I'm trying to make myself obsolete," she says. "Twenty years from now, I don't want to hear any former students apologize because they can't balance a checkbook."

Michael Tevlin is a freelance writer, communication consultant, and musician living in Portland, Oregon. ■

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